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THE MAURYAS REVISITED

ROMILA THAPAR

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Preface

Ancient history moves in the realms of surmise, given the nature of the sources. But attempts at reconstruction have to be made, and this is one such. If it seems based on suppositions, then I can only repeat the dictum of A.H.M. Jones who maintained that, "historians of ancient periods are unable to resist weaving a frail tissue of tenuous conjectures".

The first lecture is essentially a re-interpretation of the Mauryan state in its role as empire, in the light of discussions on the concept of empires in the ancient world during the last couple of decades. I am concerned therefore with assessing the degree to which the Mauryan state was an empire and its duration as such.

The second lecture takes up what is now regarded as the well-worn theme of the seven 'castes' of Megasthenes and suggests that there are possibilities of looking for an explanation of this in a different way from those given so far.

Part of my purpose in returning to the Mauryan period in these lectures is to emphasise that new methods in historical interpretation and the refining of terms used in relation to the past, permit of re-interpretations of existing data.

These lectures were delivered as the Deuskar Lectures at the Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, Calcutta in December 1985.

Romila Thapar

I

Towards the Definition of an Empire: The Mauryan State

Many states in India are casually given the label of 'empire' by historians. There have been few attempts to define an empire. It remains unclear as to where a kingdom ends and an empire begins. The Sātavāhanas and the Guptas are said to have ruled empires and more recently Vijayanagara has been elevated to the same status. With the increasing interest in regional history there has been a flowering of empires. It might therefore be useful to pause and consider what qualifies a state to be called an empire.

It was once maintained somewhat tautologically, that he who takes the title of emperor rules an empire, the Latin *imperium* suggesting this definition. An empire would then have to do with the self-perception of its rulers. Therefore when a king takes a title such as *mahārājādhirāja* (king of kings) there the historian would understand that an empire was meant. But this argument would not hold in the case of the Mauryan king Aśoka who sometimes refers to himself merely as, *rājā magadhe* (the king of Magadha)¹ or as *devānampīya* (the beloved of the gods) leaving it to relatively small kings of later times to take the more grandiose title. Epigraphic evidence from the latter provides a rhetoric of high-sounding phrases. On the analogy of the Roman empire which was often taken as a model, historians have implicitly accepted two features as characteristic of an empire. One is extensive conquest and territorial control.

The other, sometimes a corollary of the first, is the domination over people who were regarded as culturally different if not inferior and who were seen initially as aliens. Both these characteristics which may well have been consequential also to nineteenth century European colonial experience, further subscribed to the notion that a certain association with 'glory' was expected of ancient empires : that these were high periods of art and of literature and of monumental buildings.

Territory is often presented as the primary feature but territorial control by itself is not sufficient, as even this is related to other aspects. The territory of an empire covers a variety of regions including geographically nuclear ones and those more isolated. The political importance of nuclear regions is not constant and the areas defined as such change over time, the change being dependent on ecological, technological and economic factors. A region is not necessarily just a smaller area for there is a certain interplay between a region and the totality of an empire which defines the nature of a region. It is relevant to ask whether an imperial system silts up regional features or whether it intensifies them through the exploitation of resources. This does not apply only to economic resources but also relates to patterns of acculturation of religious expression.

The phrase 'control over territory' remains ambiguous, for such control can be of various kinds. The most direct is conquest and the induction of territory into the existing administrative structure of a state. Less direct is the mere capturing of the capital of another state and using the existing system as a channel for drawing on economic resources and cultural ties. Further removed from direct control would be a quick campaign and nominal subjugation, or, the control over a particular route without necessarily conquering its hinterland. Territory therefore is only one among the factors defining a state or an empire. Historical tradition has also to be treated with caution on the question of territory for sometimes a later tradition associates an area with a well-known king as part of a process of legitimization. Thus Aśoka is said to have visited Khotan and the founding of the kingdom is attributed to Indians and Chinese who came there during his reign.²

Conquest is also linked to the notion of the demarcation of

territory. In the absence of cartography there can be no boundary lines bilaterally agreed upon. Frontiers are at best natural boundaries or else buffer zones.³ Such frontiers were often kept deliberately under-developed with an emphasis on indigenous defences. These were frequently areas where the intention was not to maintain a firm control but rather to leave it pliant. Frontier zones such as pastoral areas, forests, uncultivated uplands helped keep political boundaries flexible. Attitudes to territory therefore were not uniform and depended on how the state visualised its advantage from the area.

The acquisition of territory or political glory were among the lesser purposes of conquest and war. There are many other reasons why states go to war.⁴ Self-defence would seem the most evident. But for those more aggressive, there was the lure of booty and plunder, the capturing of prisoners-of-war to be used as labour, imposing of taxes, tributes and levies on the conquered and the exploitation of new lands and fresh resources. Where the acquisition of revenue was the primary motive there the conquest of fertile areas under cultivation and trade routes would be resorted to. Where territory was to be exploited it tended to be lands not fully utilised and thinly populated which could be subjected to colonisation by cultivators from other parts of the state or where raw materials would be appropriated. These were all conducive to increasing the wealth of the elite groups in the victorious state. Consolidated booty came to those in power whilst the ordinary soldier contented himself with plunder. An empire would then encourage wars and generate an income from them. If war has economic advantages then the economy of empires would be tied to war and conquest.

Studies of empires in Asia have tended to highlight these aspects but within a different context.⁵ Empire it has been argued emerges as a result of a monopoly of force based on kingship. It controls an extensive territory which it has acquired through conquest. It appropriates on a large scale revenue from agriculture and trade. It is enabled to do this partly through a control over the hydraulic machinery and a network of administration. Religion functions as an expression of the state. Size is commonly characteristic of the definition and applies to

all early empires, Achaemenid, Han, Roman. Some have argued that Asian empires were characterised by Oriental Despotism or its theoretical reincarnation, the Asiatic Mode of Production. All this implies a centralised control of all functions down to minute. Each unit, usually the village, was isolated but identical. Such a beehive structure has dominated much of our thinking on the functioning of Asian empires. This view is from above and suggests a uniform development of all areas included within the empire.

I would like to argue a different proposition.⁶ In the typology of states, empire may be seen as a complex form of the state since it includes differentiated political and economic systems. Perhaps the component units within an empire can be listed as, firstly, a metropolitan state which initiates conquest and control, secondly core areas, and thirdly a large number of variegated, peripheral areas. The metropolitan state which historically evolves from a small kingdom and becomes the nucleus of the empire, is ultimately a highly developed state and in the case of early periods, an area of primary state formation, as was Magadha in the Mauryan empire. It spread its hegemony over other areas initially through conquest. The seemingly simple title of *rājā* of Magadha was in fact a significant indicator of where the power lay. The rest of the empire could be divided into core regions and peripheral regions. Core regions were either existing states such as Gandhāra with the city of Taxila which had been incorporated into the empire, or regions of incipient state formation such as Kaliṅga and Saurāṣṭra. Or, they were existing centres of exchange such as Ujjain, Amarāvati or Bhṛghukaccha whose hinterlands were less important than the actual centre. Core regions are in a sense sub-metropolitan and on the disintegration of the empire develop into metropolitan areas. The peripheral regions have further differentiated political and economic systems in that they range from hunting and gathering to producing societies and are areas which have not known a state system. A large part of the peninsula in the Mauryan empire would have constituted such regions as also some parts of the northern sub-continent. Peripheral regions are often located in the interstices between rich agricultural belts.

Relations between the metropolitan state and each area would vary. The primary interest of the former was dominance and exploitation, often expressed through revenue collection and the appropriation of resources. If this could be easily tapped without too much interference with the existing channels then the area would be left relatively untampered with. Where this was not possible there the economic restructuring of the area would be carried out by the metropolitan state. In part this also depended upon the nature of local resources. Thus in many areas of the peninsula where the resources were semi-precious stones, gold, elephants and timber, the tapping of these appears to have been left to local agencies as long as the Mauryan state could supervise this process and acquire the resources. Since efforts were directed at enriching the metropolitan state the degree of restructuring would relate to the needs of this state and the contribution of local resources towards these needs as well as the ability of the state to draw upon these resources.

In the case of the Mauryas it seems to have been more limited than one would expect although by no means absent. The major resource to be restructured would have been agriculture for purposes of revenue. Since the metropolitan state received the revenue and organised administrative control there could be imbalances between the metropolitan state and the other regions, particularly the peripheral ones and this imbalance is reflected in the pattern of disintegration of the Mauryan empire.

Magadha was almost predictably likely to emerge as a metropolitan state. It is associated with the formation of the earliest states in the Ganges plain and under Ajātaśatru became the foremost among these. The Nandas added to its stability not only by administering the Ganges plain as an area of effective revenue collection, which would account for their fabled wealth⁷ but also by the conquest of Kalinga and the building of a canal suggestive of further efforts at extending agriculture.⁸ The Nandas are reputed to have had a vast army, so large that it daunted the Greeks and led to the retreat of Alexander. Such an army would be required not only for conquest but also to defend the conquered territory. That some territories slipped out of control might explain Aśoka having to reconquer Kalinga in spite of the Nandas having held it in

the previous century. Magadha did not have to rely on other areas for its wealth. It was agriculturally rich with a relatively high population density to work the land; it controlled the trade on the rivers of the Gangetic system particularly after the capital was shifted from Rājagṛha to Pāṭaliputra on the Ganges; it had access to iron ore to the south and to timber and elephants in the forests of the Rajmahal hills. With such a potential, any additional wealth in the form of annexation of rich neighbouring lands would provide it with the essentials for a metropolitan state.

For the Mauryas the need to conquer undoubtedly arose due to the necessity to extend the availability of resources from the more limited Ganges plain to the wider arena of the subcontinent. But other considerations were also important. The initial Mauryan expansion may have been justified as a defence of the Ganges valley against the successors of Alexander in the north-west, which situation was brought to a head in the hostilities between Candragupta Maurya and Seleucus Nicator. The north-west gave access to routes through the Hellenistic kingdoms to the markets of the eastern Mediterranean. The lower Indus region bred fine quality horses, an asset to any imperial army. The Mauryan movement into central India was almost certainly an attempt to control the route to the peninsula, the *dakṣiṇāpatha*. Further south, beyond the trade route to Sopārā in the vicinity of Bombay, lay the gold bearing areas of Karnataka, which could be approached from two directions : south of Sopārā on the west coast and along the Krishna valley on the east. The latter route may also have tapped the diamond mines of the peninsula. The reconquest of Kalinga may well have been to recover lost territory, particularly one that was rich in agriculture, trade and elephants, as well as to defend Magadha from the south-east and to protect the coastal route down the east coast. Thus the need for the Mauryas to conquer was in part to extend the availability of resources.

As compared to other early empires, such as the Achaemenid, Han, Roman, the Mauryan was short-lived. Rising with the conquests of Candragupta and reaching its peak with his grandson Aśoka, it seems to have declined rather rapidly after this. As an imperial structure it survived at most for a century. This

may well have had to do with what seems to have been a relatively limited economic restructuring of the area under its control.

A differentiation of politico-economic systems is reflected in Mauryan sources. Reference is made to the hunters and gatherers and to forest tribes (*aṭavika* or *araṇyacara*) settled both in the interior regions as well as along the borders.⁹ Royal policy tends to treat them with a certain paternal sympathy except that stern action is also threatened if they fail to obey. The containment of forest tribes at the borders may have had a variety of reasons. They generally formed the buffer zones separating well-developed areas. The fear that they could act as predators on core areas incorporating agrarian settlements and caravan routes, could have encouraged their isolation by the state. The officer in charge of the border in the *Arthasāstra* is also the one in charge of pasture lands suggesting that forests and grasslands were seen as border lands between core areas.¹⁰

The segregation of core areas was also in the interests of imperial policy and would be one way of keeping them under control without too great an input of army and administration. The chiefships of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* which could in some cases be classified as core areas find mention in the *Arthasāstra* where it is suggested that they should not be conquered and annexed outright but should be weakened by dissensions and gradually brought under control.¹¹ In agriculturally rich areas which constituted core areas there was a range of agrarian tenures as is indicated by the listing of taxes such as *bhāga*, *bali*, *piṇḍa-kara* (accumulated), *śaḍbhāga* (one-sixth), *kara* and so on. In some cases land was privately owned and taxes were paid to the state. Such areas were generally associated with earlier states in the Ganges plain. Some lands were crown lands (the *śītā* land) where cultivators were given the right to work them under the supervision of the *śītādhyakṣa* or superintendent of agriculture.¹² The *śītā* lands were again worked on a variety of tenures : the employment of hired labourers and slaves, the *dāsa-bhṛtaka* or the *dāsa-karmakara* ; or the employment of those who were serving a penal sentence, or share-cropping or the payment of a share of the produce. Exchange systems also ranged from barter to the more complex commercial transactions involving not only markets and trade but also production centres as exem-

plified in the activities of the guilds or *śrenī*s and the traders or *setthi*s.

This diversification was not limited to any one part of the empire but lay juxtaposed in various regions.¹³ Nor was any attempt made to reduce the range to a uniform system, for example to convert pastoralists to agriculture or to encourage them to change from itinerant to commercial exchange. Possibly there were ecological constraints on such change and the technology of the time could not overcome these constraints. The state was primarily concerned with the extraction of revenue from all kinds of activities, if the advice of Kauṭalya was to be followed (as given in Book II which is believed to be of the Mauryan period).

It has long been a puzzle as to why, if Kauṭalya had known a large imperial state, his work should be concerned with a smaller state. He may well have been describing the functioning of a metropolitan state given his near obsession with the assessment and collection of revenue. He has much to say on the cultivation of *śūā* lands. The settling by the state of new areas or deserted areas is advised.¹⁴ Peasant migrations from other states or from elsewhere in the same state are encouraged so that new lands can be settled. Peasant migration when not initiated by the state was a common form of peasant protest and there is a fear of peasants migrating from their lands when regimes become oppressive.¹⁵ The reference to deserted areas could be to such lands. That peasants were encouraged to migrate from neighbouring states was because they then became an agency of revenue for the state where they settled. This advice to the ruler to encourage such migrations would suggest that there might perhaps have been a shortage of manpower to develop new agricultural resources on a large scale. Flood plains might also constitute deserted areas since floods often led to a shift of cultivation. But such shifts were generally temporary and even archæological evidence of the Ganges flood plain in western Uttar Pradesh suggests the reoccupation of deserted land.¹⁶ Deserted lands may also refer to those once under swidden agriculture from where earlier settlers had moved or to conquered lands from where the previous peasants had fled because of the campaign. However Megasthenes does

make a point of stating that even when battles are raging, peasants in the vicinity continue to cultivate the land, since soldiers were forbidden from molesting peasants. This probably had more to do with the fact that the Mauryas did not conscript the peasantry but relied on a standing army rather than that Indian soldiers were not given to plunder.¹⁷ The lack of conscription might again have been conditioned by the need to keep as much manpower as possible on the land. Cultivators are described as the largest segment of society by Megasthenes. Peasants from one's own state brought to settle such lands would be a shift of the excessive population from one area to another as advised by Kauṭalya. This would more likely refer to a shift of those working on *śītā* lands. It has been argued that the prisoners taken after the Kalinga campaign of Aśoka were deported to new agricultural settlements.¹⁸

Prisoners-of-war are listed as a regular source for the supply of slaves.¹⁹ Some were undoubtedly used as labour to cultivate the *śītā* lands. However slaves were not the only source of labour and hired labourers and share croppers are also referred to. There is unfortunately virtually no evidence on how and when agrarian tenures were changed after the conquest of an area during this period. That Kauṭalya advises the settling of *śūdra* cultivators by the state is not without interest. Even if it is not taken literally the intention of using the pressures of caste to contain cultivators is clear.

Arable land was allotted to cultivators only for a lifetime. Therefore the state had complete control over such land. This was a very different system from that of the land grants of the later period which were permanent and revenue free. Such grants are suggested by Kauṭalya limiting them to brāhmaṇs and to those associated with the administration and such grants although heritable could not be sold or mortgaged. The boundaries of fields brought under cultivation were carefully fixed, doubtless for reasons of assessment and collection. The state was also required to assist with seed, irrigation water and adjustments of revenue demands in the initial stages. Clearly good land had to be intensively cultivated and a revenue derived from it. Did the Mauryas follow this advice? There is little evidence from other sources on the settling of new land. The

reference to the deportation of prisoners-of-war after the Kalinga campaign may have led to the cultivation of waste land but references to colonies and settlements of this kind are rare. A passing reference to land revenue is made in one of the inscriptions of Aśoka. In the Rummindei Inscription located at Lumbinī, the king states that because it was the birth-place of the Buddha he is lifting the *bali* and reducing the *bhāga*,²⁰ both of which were taxes, the former probably associated with the area of land under cultivation and the latter being a share of the produce. It is curious that the king does not exempt the village entirely from taxes as one would expect given its association but doubtless revenue demands could not be dismissed so lightly. In case it was privately owned land state legislation on tax exemption would in that case have been limited.

Intensifying agriculture would have required some state interest in irrigation or what has been described as the hydraulic machinery. To date there is only a single largescale irrigation work which is attributed to Mauryan enterprise, the dam on the Sudarshan lake at Girnar.²¹ From the evidence of archæology this would be regarded as a core area. The absence of large scale irrigation works elsewhere may suggest that there were not many extensive areas brought under state agriculture. More frequently the reference is to small scale privately organised irrigation. Kauṭalya refers to water taken from rivers, pools, tanks, wells and springs.²² These water works and the channels used with them were constructed through local enterprise and were individually maintained or through a pooling of the resources of local people. State assistance is mentioned in connection with the cultivation of *śītā* lands. Where the state provided irrigation it also charged a higher cess for water (*udaka-bhāga*). Irrigation allowed of double cropping with summer rice and winter wheat and barley in areas where both these crops could be grown. Megasthenes writes that double cropping was possible because of the natural fertility of the soil and the abundant and regular rainfall.²³ But then he is also quoted in another passage (the authenticity of which has been doubted) as having said that a special category of officers was responsible for controlling the supply of water to cultivators by keeping a check on the sluices.²⁴ If this was in practice in Mauryan

India it probably applied only to the *śtā* lands. That the need for and the nature of irrigation, would vary from crop to crop is not reflected in these texts.

The other source of revenue which was beginning to be tapped at the state level in the Mauryan period and which was to grow considerably in the post-Mauryan period, was trade. The superintendent of trade, the *paṇyādhyakṣa*, and the director of tolls and customs duties are given carefully worked out instructions and this is corroborated by the account of Megasthenes.²⁵ (If these instructions were followed then the picture suggested is that of administered trade in the sense in which Polanyi uses the term). The state was required to keep a check on the items brought for trade and to direct the profits as well, so that the state may derive an advantage from the sale. The superintendent of trade was to be familiar not only with the provenance of goods traded, but also their mode of transportation, supply and demand and their price. He is also instructed to create a rise in price if need be. Customs houses at the gates of the city were to stamp the passes of traders bringing in goods and check the goods brought in. An elaborate list of penalties is included for any attempt at fraud or hoodwinking the state. Items such as weapons, armour, coats-of-mail, metals, chariots, gems, grain and cattle are not to be included as items of exchange and the state clearly had a monopoly over these. The list is somewhat unrealistic since cattle and grain would certainly have been traded in village marts. But presumably these restrictions apply to the bringing in of such items into the cities. Goods were to be sold only by authorised persons at authorised places.

Traders are treated with an element of suspicion and artisans and guilds are also to be under constant scrutiny. In the lay out of the city a part of the non-residential area near the city wall, was kept for the dwellings of the guilds and foreign merchants.²⁶ Craftsmen involved in the same or similar professions lived together and could sell their goods only at authorised places.²⁷ In the absence of an open general market, sale and purchase of items was doubtless to be carried on in that part of the city where these items were produced. Thus the trading nuclei of the city were to be kept distinct from other

functional areas. Marshall's interpretation of the data from Bhir Mound at Taxila would support this picture. The workshops and presumably the shops seem to have been located along the exterior walls of houses with no direct access to the house.²⁸ There is also an absence of any central market similar to an agora.

Artisans and traders are discussed in further detail in the section of the *Arthaśāstra* which deals with the suppression of criminals : the assumption being that both categories flourish through cheating and the state has to intervene to prevent this.²⁹ Artisans cheat by undercutting on the quality of the items and traders by selling these as prime quality goods. Also thieves in the guise of artisans can oppress people. There is a preference for the guild rather than the individual artisan since the guild would be more responsible and easier to negotiate with. Fines for late delivery or liabilities for loss or destruction were more easily imposed on guilds than on individuals. That artisans were regarded as low on the social scale is indicated by the inclusion of various low castes in the same chapter such as washerman, tailors, attendants, physicians and wandering minstrels and mendicants. Presumably those artisans who worked directly for the state such as armourers would have had a higher status and been treated with greater respect. In the scale of salaries of perhaps a later period, that of artisans employed by the state was a hundred and twenty *paṇas* which is not a particularly high salary considering that the foreman of labour received sixty *paṇas* and the soldiers and clerks, five hundred *paṇas*.³⁰

Traders were to be subjected to massive fines if their goods were found to be below standard. Thus there was support for the idea of a quality control enforced by the state. This was different from the system of barter where quality control is implicit in the exchange. If such fines were actually in operation they may well have acted as a disincentive to trade. As a further disincentive, the text argues for a fixing of the permissible profit at five per cent above the permitted sale price of local goods, and ten per cent on foreign goods. An excessive profit was also subjected to a fine. There was not only a suspicion of traders but perhaps also a fear that a large amassing of wealth by guilds and traders would encourage their becoming

alternative sources of power to the state. The brāhmaṇ animosity to traders and the city which is expressed in early *dharmasūtra* literature may well have been responsible for these statements in the *Arthaśāstra* although one wonders whether Kauṭilya would give priority to being a good brāhmaṇ rather than an astute advisor on revenue. Whether these injunctions were adhered to closely can only be gauged when we have more evidence on urban conditions in the Mauryan period : evidence which can be best obtained from horizontal excavations. The rise to importance of guilds and traders in the post-Mauryan period is noticeable, where not only was there more trade but the traders and the guilds were wealthy enough to become major patrons of religion and did assert a social identity which contradicted their low status as maintained in the *śāstras*.

Political suzerainty implied control over economic resources. This varied according to the resource and its function in the Mauryan economy. The major agricultural regions were the Ganges plain, Saurāṣṭra in the west, the deltas of the Mahanadi, Krishna and Godavari in the east, and the Raichur doab in the south. The latter is rich in megalithic sites often succeeding chalcolithic cultures and therefore pointing to a pre-Mauryan settlement. There are Aśokan inscriptions in the vicinity of places such as Maski and Brahmagiri, and the important Mauryan administrative town of Suvarṇagiri was located in this area. That Maski was not an isolated settlement is clear not only from the clusters of sites in the vicinity, but also, by a large number of beads including some of lapis lazuli found in Period II of the excavation,³¹ contemporary with the Mauryan which must have travelled a long way to get there (the nearest source of lapis being Badakshan in Afghanistan). There is ample evidence of gold working ; this probably being the primary motivation for Mauryan control over the area, its agricultural produce forming a secondary interest. The gold was doubtless sent back to Magadha, for its occurrence in the habitation sites or burials is not common. What is found in the megalithic burials is a fraction of what would have been available from the region. Nor is there much evidence at this time of the prosperity associated with a wealthy area, if it is argued that the gold was recycled locally. There is much on the technology of

working gold in the *Arthasāstra* and the careful supervision of its production.³² The obtaining of gold was the main concern for there does not seem to have been a significant attempt on the part of the Mauryas to change the economy of this region. In fact the Mauryan presence is difficult to ascertain from excavations alone. The inland sites of the peninsula contrast noticeably with those of the coastal areas where at Amarāvati for instance there is greater evidence of NBP and punch-marked coins. The eastern deltas appear to have been more directly under the control of Mauryan administration although the Aśokan inscriptions do refer to the officers of the southern region. The existence of megalithic burials prior to the Mauryan period indicates that the organisation of labour in some form was in practice and this organisation would have been adapted to imperial requirements.

Access to raw materials appears to have been the prime motivation for the conquest of the peninsula where timber and semi-precious stones—quartz, agate, carnelian—were easily available as also were elephants. Indian elephants believed to be invincible in battle were in great demand both by the Seleucids in west Asia and the Ptolemies in north Africa. Control over trade routes and trading points was equally important. This would have taken the Mauryan armies into north-western India with the focus on Gandhāra and the city of Taxila providing access to overland routes to Hellenistic west Asia. The treaty with Seleucus provided the Mauryas with the valuable province of Arachosia and the city of Kandahar which was a nodal point in Hellenistic trade. The locations of inscriptions other than the ones at specifically Buddhist sites points to trade routes having been a significant consideration. Mansehra and Shahbazgarhi were not only linked to the north-west but probably also to the Gilgit-Chitral area as has been revealed in the recent discovery of *kharoṣṭhi* inscriptions of the Kuṣāṇa period along the Karakoram highway.³³ Indraprastha and its vicinity controlled routes to the Ganges river system as well as the *dakṣiṇāpatha* going to the peninsula. The sites along the Gandak river follow the well-established northern route or *uttarāpatha*. A major central Indian route from Pāṭaliputra passed through the Mauryan sites of Sahasram, Rupnath and Hoshangabad

(Panguraria) and proceeded to Sopārā on the west coast. Sopārā in all likelihood had a coastal-cum-inland link with the Bellary district (where Aśokan inscriptions have recently been discovered at Nittur and Udegolam) with further links to the Raichur area. The eastern route from Pāṭaliputra with a branch perhaps to Mahasthan developed further into the maritime route along the east coast touching the Mahanadi delta and continuing to the Krishna delta from where the route turned inland and continued to Yerragudi, Jatinga Rameshwar and other sites located again in an area of megalithic cultures and sources of gold.

The location of the Mauryan inscriptions found so far is suggestive of a pattern which follows the known routes and skirts around what might be called the peripheral regions of this period. The northern Deccan remains relatively secluded. Similarly Sind, the confluence of the rivers of the Punjab and north-western Rajasthan are devoid of Mauryan remains. This raises the question of whether it is legitimate to argue for the presence of a political control in areas where there is no evidence of a Mauryan presence. Was the control geographically selective ?

Yet, some of these areas were actively involved in the campaign of Alexander which preceded the rise of the Mauryas and also in the hostilities between the Mauryas and the Seleucids. It is unlikely that the Seleucids would have ceded Arachosia and Gedrosia (southern Afghanistan to the Makran) if they were not contiguous to Candragupta's domain. The Aśokan inscriptions refer to the Yona, the Kamboja, Gandhāra, the Rīṣṭhika or Rathika and Pitinika as of the west.³⁴ In the south the Cola, Pāṇḍya, Satiyaputra and Keralaputra as far as Tāmraparṇi are mentioned as inhabiting the land on the frontier (*amta*) and this is made more explicit by reference to Antiochus the Greek ruler as being also at the frontier.³⁵ Those within the empire (*idha rājaviṣayam*) are the Yona, Kamboja, Nābhaka, Nābhapankti, Bhoja, Pitinika, Āndhra and Parinda.³⁶ There is a distinction between those within the empire and those at the frontier. There is also a distinction between the south Indian neighbours who are referred to by their lineage names and the Hellenistic neighbouring states, the names of whose kings are mentioned. A recurring pattern in the Mauryan inscriptions

it suggests a pre-state system prevalent in the southern regions. This would not contradict the evidence from either archæology or the ealy Sangam literature.

The routes linking the location of the Mauryan inscriptions often developed into major routes and centres in the post-Mauryan period. It is interesting that the Major Rock Edicts are located at important nodal points along routes and at centres associated with trade. The pride which Aśoka took in the building of roads was legitimate since these served administrative requirements but at the same time facilitated trade. For purposes of revenue the control of routes and of major trading centres would have been sufficient without the need to control the upland of these centres. If the Mauryas took the advice of Kauṭalya then the suggestion of administered trade might have been almost stifling for the possible development of trade during this period. It would seem that the Mauryas were content to tap whatever revenue they could from the existing commerical activities and did not perhaps exploit this potential to its full extent. It is curious for example that they do not appear to have issued coined metallic money of a distinctive kind, for this in early societies is generally a pointer to the state intervening in urban trade. In spite of arguments in support of certain categories of punch-marked coins being issued by the Mauryan rulers,³⁷ it is still generally accepted that these coins were issued by guilds or other local bodies and date to a period prior to the Mauryas and continuing to the end of the millennium. This would point to the continuing importance of trade centres rather than the state fully controlling trade in spite of the advice of Kauṭalya.

Conquest and control over such distant areas even if only partially direct and concentrated only on routes and centres of raw material would have required a considerable financial outlay in terms of military and administrative organisation. Greek and Latin sources refer to the enormous army maintained by the Nandas and Mauryas. The figures mentioned by Plutarch and Pliny were doubtless exaggerated in order to justify Alexander's retreat, arguing that he would have faced a formidable force had he ventured into the Ganges plain. Plutarch's reference to an army of six hundred thousand³⁸

seems highly exaggerated considering that this was double the figure for the entire infantry of the Roman empire before Diocletian increased it in the third century A.D. thereby shaking the economy of the empire.³⁹ Since the Mauryan empire did not have access to the same economic base as the Roman empire and there was no conscription this figure hardly seems tenable. If the size of an army has any relation to population size as is argued by some scholars then even from this perspective the figures are exaggerated. (Incidentally the calculation of the population of the Mauryan empire as one hundred and eighty one million is based on the figures for the army quoted in Greek and Latin sources and the basic evidence therefore is not reliable).⁴⁰ It is also unlikely that there would have been a substantially larger population in the Mauryan period as compared to the Mughal period. Furthermore the entire arming of the soldiery was the responsibility of the Mauryan state since private arms were not permitted.⁴¹ If Megasthenes was right then not only the armour but even horses and elephants for the other wings of the army were a monopoly of the state,⁴² the maintenance of which would certainly have added up to a major financial burden. In addition there was a comfortable salary for soldiers.⁴³ The *Arthaśāstra* suggests a smaller army since it refers to the induction of a variety of paramilitary groups at the time of a campaign.⁴⁴ The financial involvement in maintaining a large army may have been one among other reasons for pursuing a policy of non-violence subsequent to effective control over major areas of resources. However, the reconciling of non-violence with imperial demands may have been a difficult proposition. The concept of aggressive expansion was familiar to brāhmaṇ ideology with the central role of sacrificial rituals such as the *aśvamedha* and the *rājasūya* eulogising such expansion. Significantly the Mauryan kings in spite of their impressive conquests are not associated with these rituals. Buddhism on the contrary emphasised the role of the *dharma rāja* which made such rituals irrelevant. Whether the Buddhist concept of the universal monarch or *cakkavattin* pre-dated Aśoka or developed after the reign of Aśoka remains a controversial point. Territory although important as the area where the wheel of the *cakkavattin* rolls is nevertheless subservient as a concept to the

notion of the *cakkavattin* being defined as a just ruler and one who rules in accordance with the *dhamma* for if he fails to do so then the wheel sinks into the ground and disappears. Aśoka may well have seen himself as a *cakkavattin* and hence his insistence on ruling in accordance with *dhamma* even if the latter was of his own defining. What is often forgotten is that there was also a hierarchy of *cakkavattins* : the *cakkavāla* or *cāḷuranta cakkavattin* who ruled over the four quarters, the *dīpa-cakkavattin* who ruled a single quarter and the *padesa-cakkavattin* who ruled over only a part of one.⁴⁵

Administrative organisation seems to have been divided into those who functioned in an advisory and supervisory capacity and others at a lower level who carried out the routine requirements. The distance between the two was extreme where the ratio of the salary of the clerk to the minister was one is to ninety-six.⁴⁶ The upper ranks were well-paid. The *samahartṛ* or chief collector received half the salary of the *manṛ* ; the *rāṣṭrapāla* and the *antapāla*, provincial and frontier officers received a quarter ; the *padestrṛ* received one-sixth ; and the superintendents of the various wings of the army, received one-twelfth. After this comes a sudden decrease with the salary of other superintendents in the ratio of 1:48. The clerks, accountants and the foot soldiers all received the same salary which works out to 1:96. Admittedly this information comes from what may be a post-Mauryan section of the book. Furthermore these were obviously not exact salaries and there is a certain play on numbers—2, 4, 8, 12, 48, 96. Nevertheless what is of interest is the demarcation and disparity between the higher ranks and the lower where in the case of the lower there is a substantial drop in the salary.

It is difficult to ascertain the value of these salaries as we do not have evidence of prices. The Jātaka literature informs us that a pair of oxen could be purchased for twenty-four *paṇas*, a slave for a hundred *paṇas* and a thoroughbred horse for a thousand *paṇas*.⁴⁷ As against this the salary of the soldier and the clerk in the *Arthaśāstra* is listed as five hundred *paṇas*, assuming that the same coin is being referred to in both sources and that it had identical value. Given the statement of Megasthenes that the soldiers lived very well on their salaries, it would seem

that the salaries of the upper levels of the administration were excessively high. If taken literally this in itself may well have caused a severe financial drain on the resources of the empire. Even if it is not taken literally the salary scale suggests that the ruling elite had access to a large income.

In a chapter on the activity of the *samahartṛ* or chief collector we are told that his work was largely that of maintaining the records of revenue.⁴⁸ The actual recovery of the revenue was the work of the *gopa* and the *sthanika* probably under the supervision of the *pradestṛ*. Whereas the latter is listed among the recipients of a high salary (1 : 6) the former two are not listed at all. This may suggest that the *gopa* and the *sthanika* were locally recruited persons who were permitted to keep a portion of the revenue collected in lieu of a salary, or, as is stated in another section of the text, are given grants of land without the right of sale or mortgage and therefore their salaries were low or omitted from the list.⁴⁹ If the *pradestṛ* was the same as the *pradeśika* mentioned in the Aśokan inscriptions⁵⁰ then this functions involved tours of inspection and presumably in that capacity he had a higher status than the local officers. In the absence of any central recruitment to administrative office it is likely that the higher officials came from the metropolitan state or the core regions, toured their area of jurisdiction and ensured the channelling of revenue to the capital. There is however the problem of Tuṣāspa who had a high office in Saurāṣṭra and yet seems to have been a local person unless he was recruited from the north-west (as his Iranian name suggests) and was posted to Saurāṣṭra. The actual collectors at the level of village and town may have been local appointees. In the peripheral areas some of these were likely to have been clan chiefs. The post-Mauryan period sees the rise of the Mahābhōja, Mahārathi, Mahatalāvāra and so on, suggestive of chiefs acting as intermediaries between clan and empire. With the breakdown of empire and the rise of local states around the core regions these intermediaries would continue to be important in relations between the new states and what were earlier peripheral areas. If such a system prevailed there would be a greater uniformity of administration at the upper levels and local administration would be more decentralised. The administrative

organisation when seen from the upper levels would suggest a centralised, uniform administration geared to the requirements and functions of the metropolitan state. But when seen from the lower levels it would be far less uniform. The high salaries of the upper levels would have been possible if the revenue was in large part taken back to the metropolitan state and then redistributed according to administrative and state requirements. The fact of listing salaries is suggestive of such a system. However what is not certain is whether such salaries were actually paid in money or merely computed in terms of money but paid in kind.

The emphasis on uniformity in empires is sometimes reflected in symbols and at ideational levels. The exploitation of an alien people with an alien culture as part of the definition of an empire becomes significant in this context. The more obvious symbols are of course monuments which encapsulate both the authority of the state and the stamp of the state. Of these there is a conspicuous absence in the Mauryan empire other than in the capital at Pāṭaliputra. None of the cities which are associated with provincial government such as Taxila at Bhir Mound or Vidiśā, Toṣali and Suvarṇagiri (Kaṇakagiri) display structures characteristic of the Mauryas ; nor for that matter are there such indications at other towns where inscriptions have been found. Possibly Mauryan monuments were engulfed in post-Mauryan reconstruction. Aśoka may well have constructed *stūpas* at places of Buddhist worship even though surprisingly he nowhere claims to have done so beyond the repair and reconstruction of a couple. The structures even if symbolising considerable piety must nevertheless have been simple. It was in the post-Mauryan period that the *stūpas* were enlarged, encased in stone and embellished with sculpture. The patronage involved in making these monuments memorable came not from imperial monarchs but in the main from the community of monks, nuns, artisans and small-scale land owners. The description of Pāṭaliputra given by Megasthenes is impressive and the Persian parallels of what emerged from the Kumrahar excavations would suggest that the city was built by Candragupta. Did Aśoka lack the public finance to continue such building or did he prefer to build rest houses and wells along the highways which no longer

survive ? The excavating of caves at Barābar did not require a major financial outlay judging by the frequency with which this was done in the post-Mauryan period. The pillars with their elaborately sculpted capitals and finely polished shafts are the contribution of Aśoka to public structures and these again did not require extensive financing.⁵¹ Some pillars were especially made others were already in existence. Some labour and money would have been expended in transporting the sandstone from Chunar to various sites in the Ganges valley where they have been found. The pillars are located either within reach of Chunar or with access to the river system suggesting transportation by river. The increase in the number of pillars from the pre-Mauryan to the Mauryan period points to an enhancement in the making and placing of pillars. Yet the increase in numbers is small and is restricted to the Ganges river system and would not have required a major financial investment. The polishing and sculpting of these is impressive yet when compared to other imperial monuments in various parts of the contemporary world do not suggest a spectacular use of wealth and labour. The major monuments were restricted to the capital of the metropolitan state indicating again the channelling of wealth to the capital. Yet even these when imaginatively reconstructed remain a pale second to the grandeur of Persepolis or the almost incredible concept of the burial mounds associated with Shi Huang Ti at Sian.

One may well ask where did the wealth go in the Mauryan period? Where then are the villas of the rich or the physical manifestation of a high standard of material prosperity? Was the wealth consumed in a manner which left few traces? Did status still lie in the holding of lengthy sacrificial rituals where large amounts of wealth were offered, distributed, destroyed, leaving virtually no trace? Or it may have been expended on good living involving destructable items. Buddhist ethics during this period may have discouraged the conspicuous display of wealth. Was the Buddhist ethic on the importance of investment taken seriously and did this form the bed rock of the evident prosperity of the post-Mauryan period ? This ethic was supported by Aśoka's *dhamma* where in his inscriptions he advocates a moderated life free from excesses of any kind. This

was to change in the post-Mauryan period when donations to the *saṅgha* and the embellishments of the *stūpa* were encouraged. Was the wealth conserved and buried in the form of treasure? Hence perhaps the frequency of references in theoretical works to the king's claims on the discovery of treasure troves which are listed as part of legitimate revenue.⁵² Or do we have to concede that the amount of wealth generated during the Mauryan period was less than what the idea of empire conveys.

An attempt at uniformity at the ideational level is emphasised in the rock inscriptions and pillar inscriptions set up by Aśoka in various parts of his territory. His definition of *dhamma* as an ethical principle was an attempt to provide a common factor even if only of an abstract kind. That it was not meant as an imposition of Buddhism seems evident. In the Greek and Aramaic versions the idiom is that of Greek and Iranian belief. Thus *dhamma* is not translated into Greek as the teachings of the Buddha but as *eusebeia*⁵³ which refers to sacred and filial duty and ethical values. The Aramaic version makes a reference to the pious not being judged suggestive of the Zoroastrian idea of a Judgement after death.⁵⁴ The attempt then was to appeal to a broader spectrum of belief and behaviour emphasised by most of the religious teachers of that time without necessarily associating this idea with any single one of them. Discussions on the meaning of *dharma/dhamma* were current among the major religious and philosophical sects and by providing his own definition Aśoka was participating in the debate. Moving away from the requirements of confrontation, conquest and hegemony associated with imperial systems he was emphasising the process equally important to imperial needs of acculturation and this he sought to encourage through a policy of persuasive assimilation in which conforming to the broad ethical ideals of *dhamma* was central. His ideas on *dhamma* therefore borrow from the current debate but are set within an imperial framework. That ultimately these ideas did not work at a political and social level was partly because ideology can be a driving force of history but is not a sufficient cause of history. The cultural norm of the Mauryan state would have been the culture essentially of the middle Ganges plain. The culture of the north-west and the peninsula would be seen as different

if not even a little alien. This is suggested by one of the cultural signals of the Mauryan empire, that of language. The inscriptions of the north-west use Greek, Aramaic and Prākṛit but the latter written in the Aramaic-influenced *kharoṣṭhi* script. The need to inscribe in Greek and Aramaic may suggest the rather tenuous hold of the Mauryas in Afghanistan. Prākṛit with some regional variations and written in the *brāhmī* script is common elsewhere and in the peninsula. The inscriptions in the southern areas were in Prākṛit in spite of its not being the current language and this was a manifestation of imperial culture : so different from Afghanistan where the edicts were rendered into the local language and idiom. Sangam literature which is generally not dated earlier than the Mauryan period and may well be later, refers to the Velir chief of Erumaiyūr, (the Mahiṣayur or Mysore of later times).⁵⁵ This would point to the area being Dravidian speaking at this time. Prākṛit although the official language was alien. Perhaps the local language could not be used for inscriptions since it does not seem to have had a script (other than the as yet undeciphered graffitti on the pottery). This probability is further endorsed by the evolution of the Tamil-brāhmī script in the post-Mauryan period. The Mauryan presence in Tamil sources is largely restricted to descriptions of the conquerors whose chariots thundered past. Despite the cultural differences however, the ruling elite would have shared, or at any rate been aware of, a common culture, language and to some degree religion, all deriving from practices prevalent in the metropolitan state. The perception of distinct cultural expressions was significant in demarcating the metropolitan state from other areas.

The ideational search for uniformity on the part of Aśoka has to be explained. At one level it was the personal vision of a single individual but its genesis and articulation would relate to this individual's historical role as well. The Mauryas as a dynasty are implicitly given the status of *śūdras* in the Purāṇic texts perhaps because they were supporters of Jainism and Buddhism.⁵⁶ In the texts of these latter religions they are given high status. The Buddhists refer to them as a branch of the Śākya clan,⁵⁷ the highest possible status, although this may have been an attempt to link Mahinda the son of Aśoka who

brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka with the family of the Buddha. The Mauryan support of non-brahman sects requires an explanation. Was the family really of low origin and therefore required legitimization through patronising those sects which paid little attention of *varṇa* status? Alternatively were they merely being conventional in patronising the dominant sects of the region which was the base of their empire—the middle Ganges valley? The universalistic ethic of these sects as opposed to the caste-based ethic of brahmanical teaching suited the needs of empire since it could forge new ties across clans, tribes and castes. The *rājā* and the *bhikṣu* had a polar relationship in Buddhist thought,⁵⁸ yet the *saṅgha* prospered on royal patronage and at the same time, where such patronage was available, it provided networks of loyalty which would be supportive of political needs. The importance to the state of monastic organisation was that renunciatory orders cut across both caste and clan and weakened existing identities. Thus in the metropolitan state and the core areas where caste society was established, the *saṅgha* provided another centre of identity. Where it also supported the state this alternative identity was useful to the state. Renunciatory orders broke caste obligations and even if this applied only to the monks the fact that the monks lived in the vicinity of settlements meant that there was a continual presence of a group respected in society but not observing social obligations.⁵⁹ In the peripheral areas the *saṅgha* would again have acted as an alternative form of coalescing identity and weakening clan ties. That the latter might have been initiated in the Mauryan period is suggested by the patronage to the Buddhist and Jaina monastic complexes by ruling dynasties in these areas just after the decline of the Mauryas.

The universalising of *dhamma* by Aśoka went further than merely patronage to a particular sect. Interestingly none of his inscriptions are direct votive inscriptions to the Buddhist *saṅgha*. References to his donations come from Buddhist texts and inferentially from his repairing certain sacred monuments. On the evidence of epigraphy, the grants to the Ājīvikas were recorded on site. The *dhamma-mahāmattas* however are required to make grants to the *saṅgha*, brāhman, Ājīvikas and Nirgranthas. Yet the edicts addressed to the concerns of the *saṅgha*⁶⁰ do point

to a close relationship between the king and the *saṅgha* : a relationship which is picked up in Buddhist historiography and which is depicted as an inter-locking of the two. His espousal of the *dhamma* initially weakened the notion of divine kingship so often resorted to by the founders of empires. But in the pillar edicts issued towards the end of his reign⁶¹ there is an uncomfortable hint of what might have been an incipient cult of the king, doubtless also fostered by the continuing use of the title *devanampiya*.

Differentiations within the empire of a kind which I have been arguing for are also suggested in the pattern of the break-up of the empire and in the successor states. The metropolitan state of Magadha continued as a political entity with monarchy so firmly established that the successors to the Mauryas were unrelated to them and did not claim dynastic continuity. The Śuṅgas were brāhmaṇs and the founder was a professional soldier, the commander of the Mauryan army who assassinated the last of the Mauryas. The control of Magadha continued to extend over the Ganges plain and adjoining parts of central India. Mauryan investments in Magadha doubtless laid the foundations for its survival as a major state for some time, even if it ceased to be the nucleus of an empire. Gandhāra as a core region reverted back to monarchy although drawn into the orbit of west Asian politics. The lower Indus plain and Saurāṣṭra also had less to do with the Ganges valley. Saurāṣṭra is described in the *Arthaśāstra* as a *gaṇa-saṅgha*.⁶² Doubtless the building of the dam by the Mauryas would have brought about major economic changes. Kāliṅga probably experienced an independent monarchy for the first time. The *gaṇa-saṅghas* of north Bihar failed to survive and were incorporated into the adjacent Ganges plain. Doubtless the fertility of these areas led to their being merged into the substantial agricultural economy of the larger plain. The lineage based societies of Rajasthan however seem to have survived the Mauryas. This was ecologically not such a fertile region, its main resources being copper and a heavy dependence on pastoralism. This area was probably not brought into the agricultural vortex of the Mauryan economy. Trade routes in the western Deccan seem to have been the prime movers in the emergence of the Sātavāhanas as the ruling dynasty

where the state came into existence in what was earlier an area of lineage-based societies. Some of the peripheral areas of the peninsula continued as such, whereas others emerged as core regions which gradually became the base of monarchical states. The centrality of trade in such places as a factor in the rise of monarchies, needs to be examined.

These patterns do not indicate a uniform development of all areas held by the Mauryan state. Trade was stimulated but its potential does not seem to have been fully realised. Whereas there may have been an increase in trade and a higher standard of material prosperity reflected in Mauryan levels at excavated sites, the picture is not as rich as that of the post-Mauryan period particularly in terms of a larger community participating in this prosperity. *Śūlā* lands were cultivated but probably not as a major enterprise in every part of the empire. Apart from ecological constraints this would also have required colonies and settlers on a wider scale than the evidence suggests. If the recent identification of the dam on the Sudarshan lake is accepted⁶³ and the size of the dam calculated as given in the inscription⁶⁴ the area impounded and the area irrigated remains not too large. The use of iron technology in agriculture was effective in the Ganges valley but perhaps less so in the peninsula. Iron hoes have been found at megalithic sites many of which date to the pre-Mauryan period. There is little evidence however of any noticeable change in agricultural technology introduced during the Mauryan period at these sites. Artefacts generally associated with the Mauryan period (which are in any case not specifically Mauryan) suggest a concentration in the Ganges valley and its fringes and in central India with a scatter elsewhere. Distinctive cultures existed at the same time in the north-west and in the peninsula. The Mauryan stamp on many of these is not easily discernable from archaeological evidence. Nor do the artefacts from the limited excavations conducted so far point to any major new colonies being established at this time.

Access to labour may have created a further problem. Where slaves were not being used on a massive scale for production there was resort to using *śūdras* and low castes as hired labour. It is sometimes argued that because of the reference to *dāśas* in the sources, the Mauryan economy was dependent on slavery.

It needs to be pointed out therefore that a distinction should be maintained between domestic slavery which was generally prevalent at this time and slavery for production which was not the basis of the Mauryan economy. The term *dāsa* is often used both for pledged slaves serving a temporary term and those who were regular lifelong slaves. The former are sometimes differentiated by the word *ahitaka*. The compound phrase *dāsa-bhṛtaka* or *dāsa-karmakara* is more frequently used for labour in production. This makes it more difficult to subtract the degree of slave labour from general labour. Kauṭalya states that the *dāsa* and *karmakara* are to be paid one and a half *paṇa* per month that is eighteen *paṇas* per annum and they and their families were fed.⁶⁵ The payment to slaves, however, low would make labour more expensive than the use of unpaid slaves. Tribes inhabiting border lands and forests, the more likely deportees (other than prisoners-of-war) appear to have been left alone and not used as labour. The availability of labour also has to do with the size of the population. Unfortunately this is impossible to estimate in the absence of reliable evidence. It would require far more archaeological excavation and survey for evidence from this source to be used. An impressionistic view suggests a disparity in population distribution.

Since the slaves and hired labourers came substantially from the lower castes the question then arises as to whether it was labour that was not forth-coming or whether it was caste that made it geographically immobile. Low status in caste ranking was based on tribal identities, occupation and also location ; and above all status was relative to other groups in the area. Low castes could more easily be put to enforced labour in their own localities, where their subordinate status because of caste was easily accepted. The sharp, clear-cut, universally recognisable distinction between citizen and slave as prevailed in the Greco-Roman world was not possible in a society where some *āryas* could never become *dāsas* whereas others could, even temporarily. The *dāsa* and the *karmakara* were not a universal category easily identifiable because of being aliens as was the case with slaves in the Mediterranean world. The forceable deportation of people from other lands advised by Kauṭalya was easier as a consequence of war as in the Kalinga campaign

than as an economic policy. Was it possible then that prisoner-of-war converted to slavery and used as labour were more productive as an economic input than the enforced migration of low caste groups? If so, then with the ceasing of campaigns the availability of labour would also undergo a change.

All this is not to suggest that the Mauryan economy was static. It was a period of substantial economic change in that both agriculture and trade were stimulated. The formation of new states and the commercial prosperity of the sub-continent from the first century B.C. onwards was founded on the developments of the Mauryan period. But the growth required for sustaining an empire or even the reproduction of the existing resources appears to have been limited. When to this were added other factors of a different kind the empire declined.

In a definition of an empire of the ancient world, the two features of extensive territorial control and the governance of peoples of a different culture—what used to be called euphemistically 'other nations'—remain valid. But to these may be added the further dimension of the relation between the metropolitan state and other areas. An empire would require that revenue, labour and resources from other areas should enrich the metropolitan state and its relation to the other areas was therefore exploitative. An empire should register a range of difference in the manner in which the metropolitan state seeks to integrate the various areas which it controls. The variations are significant, for imperial policy was not necessarily trying to plane them but rather to exploit them. The intensity with which a variety of economies were restructured to the needs of the metropolitan state would be an important consideration in the survival of empires. Often these variations and the degree of restructuring is more visible in the forms of the successor states than in the empire, for empires do encourage at least the pretense of uniformity.

The Mauryan state was an empire to the extent that it did control a large territory with culturally differentiated peoples and its nucleus, the state of Magadha, was enriched by the flow of revenue and resources from other regions. That it was unable to restructure to a greater degree the economy of the core and

peripheral areas would perhaps explain why it was short-lived. Its primary concern was with extracting revenue from existing resources and probably not to the same extent with creating new resource bases. This might in part also explain why the imperial idea never really took root in the Indian sub-continent in early times in spite of the rhetoric of texts and inscriptions ; where exploitative states were plentiful but where the overwhelming power of metropolitan states remained curtailed.

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12. *Ibid.*, 2.24 ; 2.24 ; 2,6.
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26. *Artha*. 2.4.16 ; See R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, II, Bombay 1972, p. 69.
27. *Ibid.* 2.36. 6-7.
28. J. Marshall, *Taxila*, I, Cambridge 1951, p. 103 ff.
29. *Artha*. 4.1 ; 4.2.
30. *Ibid.* 5.3 14-17.
31. B. K. Thapar, 'Maski 1954', *Ancient India*, 1957, 13, pp. 86-7 ; R. E. M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947', *Ancient India*, 1947-8, 4, 180 ff.
32. 2.13 and 14.
33. A. H. Dani, *Chilas*, Islamabad, 1983. Engravings of ibexes and other animals on the rocks point to an early settlement of the area.
34. MRE V, Bloch, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
35. MRE II, Bloch, *op.cit.*, p. 93. Epigraphic confirmation of the Satīyaputra has recently come from a post-Mauryan inscription at Jambai.
36. MRE XIII, Bloch, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-1.
37. D. D. Kosambi, *Indian Numismatics*, New Delhi, 1981.
38. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* VI. 21-22 ; Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, LXII.
39. M. I. Finley, 'The Question of Population', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 1958, 48, pp. 156-64. 'Manpower and the Fall of Rome', *Aspects of Antiquity : Discoveries and Controversies*, New York, 1966.
40. J. M. Datta, 'Population of India about 320 B.C.', *Man in India*, Oct-Dec. 1962, Vol. 42, No. 4.
41. 5.3.38.
42. Strabo XV. 1. 41.
43. Arrian XII.
44. 2.33.8.
45. *Dīgha Nikāya*, 1.88 ; 3.156 ; *Sam. Nikāya*, 106.
46. 5.3.
47. *Nanda Jātaka* No. 39 ; *Gāmaṇi-caṇḍa Jātaka* No. 257.
48. 2.35
49. 2.1.7.
50. MRE III, Bloch, *op.cit.* p. 96.

51. John Irwin however maintains that some were pre-Aśokan. 'The True Chronology of Asokan Pillars', *Artibus Asiae*, 1983, XLIV, 4, pp. 247-65.
52. *Artha*. 4.1. 52-55.
53. J. Filliozat, 'Graeco-Aramaic Inscriptions of Asoka near Kandahar', *Ep. Ind.* 1961-2, XXXIV, p. 1 ff.
54. Romila Thapar, 'Epigraphic Evidence and some Indo-Hellenistic Contacts during the Mauryan period', in the D. C. Sircar Memorial Volume, forthcoming.
55. N. Subrahmanian, *Pre-Pallava Tamil Index*, p. 163 ; *Aham* 253 : 19 ; 115 : 5 ; 36 : 17.
56. F. E. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, London, 1931, p. 26 ff.
57. *Dīgha Nikāya* II. 116 ; *Mahāvamsa* V. 16 ; *Dīpavamsa* VI. 19.
58. S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge 1976.
59. Romila Thapar, 'Renunciation : the making of a Counter-Culture ?', in *Ancient Indian Social History : Some Interpretations*, New Delhi p. 63 ff.
60. The Kosam, Bhabra, Rummindei and Nigali-Sagar edicts, Bloch, *op.cit.*, pp. 152 ff. 154, 157, 158.
61. Bloch, *op.cit.*, p. 161 ff.
62. 2.1.4.
63. R. N. Mehta, 'Sudarsan Lake', *JOI*, Baroda, 1968, XVIII, 1 and 2, pp. 20-28.
64. Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman, *Ep. Ind.*, 8, p. 36 ff.
65. 2.24.28.

II

Megasthenes : Text and Context

Despite the proximity of the Hellenistic Greeks there is little that Indian sources have to say about them. If the Mauryas sent ambassadors to the courts of the Seleucids, Ptolemies and Macedonians there are no ambassadors journals ; nor are there any records of enterprising merchants who may have travelled to and traded at the markets of Antioch and Alexandria. There is a curious lack of interest in exterior landscapes of other regions which pervades the Indian ethos of earlier times. This is in strong contrast to the Greeks who were not only anxious to explore but also to describe what they had seen, even to the point of being accused of having invented the marvels which they associated with India. Admirals, navigators and ambassadors from west Asia have left narratives of their travels and observations.

Among the latter was Megasthenes who came from the Seleucid court and is believed to have visited the Mauryan capital and other parts of the state and has recorded his impressions in an account entitled, *Indica*. This work unfortunately has been lost and what survives of it is in the form of what are generally referred to as 'quotations' from later writers concerned with the Hellenistic world. Since the quotations are not invariably in agreement their reliability becomes uncertain. Further those who quote these passages with reference to India are authors whose interest in India is relatively marginal and is an appendix to a broader and more central concern with west Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. Nevertheless

the quotations from Diodorus, Strabo and Arrian have been used extensively by scholars in studying the Mauryan period and have raised a large number of controversies. I would like in this lecture to consider a small segment from these quotations, the passages referring to the so-called seven 'castes' of Indian society and re-examine these passages. Such a re-examination raises a number of questions. Were the passages in the later authors quotations from the original or were they a paraphrased version? Was Megasthenes referring to caste when describing Indian society? How reliable are his descriptions of the royal ownership of land? Were the accounts of India influenced by the historiography and the perceptions of Hellenistic culture which formed the intellectual background of these authors? Equally pertinent is the question of the modern interpretation of these texts. There has been a tendency to regard classical authors writing on India as largely reliable perhaps because of the sparseness of Indian descriptive sources. Such questions require attention even if they cannot be conclusively answered.

Megasthenes is quoted as having listed the following seven divisions of Indian society : philosophers, cultivators, herdsmen, artisans and traders, soldiers, overseers and councillors. The divisions are referred to in the Greek texts either as *merē* or *gene* and these terms have been variously translated as 'division' 'class' or 'caste'. Altheim uses 'class' for both *meros* and *genos* (the terms used in the original Greek).¹ Oldfather translating Diodorus renders *merē* as 'castes'² as also does Jones translating Strabo,³ whereas Brunt uses 'classes' for *genea* in Arrian.⁴ McCrindle translating Strabo refers to *merē* as 'parts' and *gene* as 'castes' both in the case of Strabo and Arrian. Because of its being a description of Indian society perhaps the term 'caste' has been commonly and arbitrarily used and there is now an established reference to the seven 'castes' of Megasthenes.

According to R. C. Majumdar, "His (Megasthenes) description of the seven castes which are unknown to Indian literature or tradition may be cited as an example where, on a few basic facts he has reared up a structure which is mostly inaccurate and misleading".⁶ This statement results from a lack of careful reading and understanding of the text. If Majumdar had been sufficiently meticulous he would have realised that not every

translation of the original texts uses the word 'caste'. As has been pointed out in a rejoinder to him⁷ it is not justified to berate Schwanbeck, who put together the fragments relating to India, because even he cautions against an indiscriminate use of the text. In the introduction to Oldfather's translation of Diodorus the translator makes it clear that he is uncertain whether Diodorus is paraphrasing directly or indirectly. The more significant question it would seem is, why was there this confusion ?

The question of how Megasthenes arrived at these seven 'castes' has now become a hardy perennial among the controversies relating to early Indian history. Many suggestions have been made on the interpretation of the seven but there is no general agreement. If Megasthenes was referring to the *varṇa* organisation of Indian society then he should have listed only the four castes of brāhmaṇs, (priests), *kṣatriyas* (warriors and land-owners), *vaiśyas* (traders and artisans), and *sūdras* (artisans and cultivators) and possibly should also have mentioned the fifth group, that of the untouchables, or at least the Caṇḍālas. If however he was referring to the *jāti* organisation then the number of castes would be innumerable and would certainly exceed seven. They might even have had to be divided into the high and the low as is common in Buddhist texts. Why then did Megasthenes give a precise list of seven ? Was he merely repeating what Herodotus earlier had said about there being seven major divisions of Egyptian society as some scholars have argued ?

Among those who have written at length on this theme are Otto Stein,⁸ B. C. J. Timmer⁹ and B. Breloer.¹⁰ Stein doubts that Megasthenes had discussions with Indians on caste since his information does not conform to what we know about caste in the Mauryan period or to the statements in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭalya, some sections of which are of the Mauryan period. Timmer was of a different opinion and felt that Megasthenes did have some familiarity with Indian theories about caste to which he probably added some oral information. Breloer makes the interesting observation that the list given by Megasthenes differs from those of Pliny and Solinus both in sequence and in number since the latter two do not refer to overseers/spies as a

separate group. Breloer makes a worthwhile distinction between the division according to *merē* which he argues related to fiscal units and the reference to *gene* which were concerned with the social ordering of the community. He argues that it was Arrian's confusion between the two which resulted in fiscal divisions being seen as castes by modern scholars. This suggestion requires that there be some analysis of the concepts of *merē* and *gene*. Van Buitenen has argued that the seven divisions should be seen as forming three groups, each determined by services to the state and fiscal requirements, what he calls, tax categories.¹¹ Thus the philosophers do not serve the state nor do they pay taxes. The soldiers, overseers and councillors are paid by the state and therefore do not pay taxes. The cultivators, herdsman, artisans and traders do not perform services for the state but pay taxes. The seven divisions therefore were essentially fiscal and were listed so by Megasthenes from observation and from information relating to the treasury. The argument is plausible to some extent but one wonders why then did Megasthenes not list them as three distinct groups rather than seven. The distinctions also do not always hold since in some cases the philosophers do serve the state in that they are supposed to foretell weather conditions and events and some among the artisans also served the state and paid no tax.

In taking up this question again I am proposing a change of focus rather than an attempt to solve the problem and the change of focus may help eventually in arriving at a solution. The question is generally analysed by comparing the text of Megasthenes, or rather the variant texts purporting to be quotations from Megasthenes, with contemporary Indian sources, especially the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. I would like to argue that there is also a need to look more analytically at the Greek texts and at Hellenistic historiography which forms their ideological context.

The earliest quotation comes in the writings of Diodorus Siculus who, as his name indicates, was a resident of Sicily but visited Egypt in the mid-first century B.C. His description of India is part of a larger work, *Library of History*, which was substantially concerned with the eastern Mediterranean and whatever was known of neighbouring north Africa and Asia and

which he based on earlier Greek accounts such as that of Megasthenes. This is not regarded as a highly scholarly work but more as a summary of contemporary knowledge about these regions.

Diodorus quoting Megasthenes writes that the Indian people (*plethos*) are divided into seven *merē*.¹² The word *meros* (in the singular) refers to a share or a portion, a heritage, a part, a lot. The sense of a part is in contrast to the whole and also carries the meaning of a branch. Diodorus then goes on to state that no one is allowed to marry a person of another *genos* or follow another calling or trade. Interestingly the word used in this section of the passage is not *meros* but *genos* which has a different meaning.¹³ *Genos* means kind or variety and is largely used of divisions relating to race, stock, family, direct descent and birth and has a common usage in Greek as 'clan'. Where Herodotus in his *History* refers to the seven *genē*¹⁴ in Egypt the word has been variously translated into English as nation, tribe, class and clan : a sad reflection on the vagaries of translation. Herodotus lists the seven *genē* as priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, tradesmen, interpreters and boatmen. Curiously cultivators are absent which is particularly strange for Egypt. Diodorus therefore uses one word for the general divisions of society which he refers to as the *merē* and another for the rules of marriage and hereditary occupation which derive from *genos*, although he illustrates it by reference to the *merē*, giving the example of a soldier not becoming an artisan or an artisan a philosopher.

As regards the seven divisions, the first is described as the order of the philosophoi, a general term translated as philosophers and the description seems to refer to brāhmaṇs (and that too the more learned or *śrotriya* brāhmaṇs). They are small in number but have a high status. They are exempt from all public duties and are neither the masters nor the servants of others. They perform sacrificial rituals and live off gifts and honours, suggestive of the *dāna* and *dakṣiṇā* given to brāhmaṇs. They make predictions about climate and weather for the state and those who err in their predictions are thereafter silent. This was an important public duty in an economy dependent on agriculture. It is curious that there should have been no

reference to the *śramana* sects associated with Buddhism, Jainism, the Ājīvikas and other such religious and philosophical movements of the period, as there is in other works quoting from Megasthenes. Perhaps this section was deleted by Diodorus ; for it is hard to explain why the term *philosophoi* was used when the functions described relate more closely to those of the priests, *hierēis*.

The second division is that of the *georgoi*, the cultivators who are exempt from public service and from war. They stay on the *chora*, the rural area and do not go to the *polis* or city. For cultivating the land they pay a *misthos* to the king since all of India is royal land and no private person can possess land. Apart from the *misthos* they pay one-fourth (of the produce) to the treasury. *Misthos* is generally regarded as a wage or payment for work done or hired service, or allowance for public service but can also be translated as rent. There are therefore two payments made by the cultivators, one on the land cultivated and the other a share of the produce. This would appear to agree with the two taxes mentioned in Indian sources, the *bali* and the *bhāga*. The Rummindei inscription of Aśoka mentions both.¹⁵ *Bhāga* is clearly a share of the produce and is normally stated to be one-sixth in Indian sources. Thus one-fourth would be higher. *Bali* may have been a tax on the area of land cultivated although it does not indicate a connection with a wage nor does it imply necessarily royal ownership of land. That all land is royal, i.e., owned by the king is contradicted by Indian sources.¹⁶ Possibly the statement was derived from the notion of the *sītā* or royal lands also referred to in the *Arthasāstra*.¹⁷ The *sītā* lands would be similar to the *chora basilike* of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. The word *misthos* however seems ambiguous when referring to what the tenants pay to the state. If the cultivators were working the land owned by the state as labour, then the state would have been paying the cultivators a wage or *misthos*. The closest equivalent in Sanskrit would be *bhāṭa* or *vetana*.¹⁸ *Misthosis* however can mean letting for hire or lease and may refer to the state leasing land. The cultivators in this case would be tenants of the state and paying a rent.

The category of *boukoloi* and *poimenes*, herdsmen and shepherds, appear to be a nomadic group as they live in tents and

include hunters. These are suggestive of pastoralists not quite settled and of their closeness to forests which often formed the major grazing grounds as Kaṭālyā suggests.¹⁹ Interestingly Diodorus does not use the word *meros* for these nomadic groups but refers to the *phylon* of shepherds and herdsmen, a word generally used for tribe. Grazing in forests would require pastoralists to be hunters as well in order to clear the area of predators before their animals could safely graze. Forests located on the borders between kingdoms acted as frontier zones and their inhabitants would tend to be left alone. If they were not incorporated into caste society, they would generally be regarded as different. The term *phylon* does suggest this. The nomadic nature of such groups may have been due to their practice of transhumance in many areas or to the circuits of grazing which required seasonal shifts.

The category of artisans, the *technitai*, are described as implement makers who are exempt from taxes and receive maintenance from the royal treasury. Presumably they work for the state but this is not the same as required service or labour in lieu of tax as is suggested by the Sanskrit *viṣṭi*.²⁰ The *Arthasāstra* refers to certain categories of artisans such as armour makers being employed by the state²¹ but the major part of the artisans work independently.

The soldiers, *polemistai*, refer to the standing army. If the figures given for the Mauryan army in other Greek and Latin sources are to be believed then the soldiers would have constituted a substantial number.²² The *ephoroi* were the overseers and the term since it implies secrecy, is also translated as spies whose function was to enquire into and inspect all sections of government work and report back to the king, or in the case of kingless states, to the archons or senior administrators. *Ephoroi* was the standard Spartan term for officials and they were required to make reports to the king. This group is familiar from Indian sources where the *Arthasāstra* refers to the *adhyakṣas* or superintendents of various departments²³ and Aśoka refers to the *pulisā* in his inscriptions.²⁴ Their presence in the kingless states, presumably the *gaṇa-saṅghas* or the *gaṇa-rājyas* points to a more sophisticated concept of administration which is corroborated by the association of a hierarchy of officials in the

state of the Vṛjjis but mentioned in Buddhists texts of a later period.²⁵

The reference to the seventh category as the *bouleuon* and *sumedre:uon* underlines Diodorus' statement that they were not ordinary advisors but were members of recognised administrative bodies of high status. The Boule was a formally constituted body of advisors or any council of a Greek city as also was the Synod. Both the Boule and the Synod were well-established institutions in the Greek states of Asia Minor as well. The nearest equivalent would be the *sabhā* or *pariṣad* of Mauryan times and this category probably referred to the *amātyas* and *mahāmātras* of the Mauryan administration.

Our second author Strabo, also quotes from Megasthenes in his famous work, *The Geography*.²⁶ Strabo was born in Pontos in Asia Minor and was therefore even closer to the Hellenistic world and was a slightly later contemporary of Diodorus having written his book at the turn of the Christian era. His father and grand-father were involved in the politics of Roman generals and he himself was not only familiar with Rome but had also worked at Alexandria in Egypt. His book is knowledgeable on the eastern Mediterranean though doubtless the interest in Asia increased with the spurt in the Roman trade with the east. Strabo was writing at the peak period of the trade with India and one would therefore expect fuller information as compared to earlier texts.

Strabo refers to the people (*plethos*) of India being divided into seven *merē* and lists these in much the same way as Diodorus although with some variants. However when speaking of marriage and occupation he refers to the groups as *genē* and repeats the information regarding the restrictions of marrying within the *genos* and keeping to the same occupation. However he adds that only the philosophers can marry outside their *genos*.

Strabo's description of the *philosophoi* refers to the *brachmanes* but also includes another quotation from Megasthenes which Strabo reads as *garmanes*.²⁷ This seems to be a mistaken reading for *śramanas*. The dual division of the brāhmaṇs and the *śramanas* is corroborated in the inscriptions of Aśoka.²⁸ Strabo's description of the *brachmanes* carries hints of the system of the four *āśramas* which was considered as the ideal curriculum for

a brāhmaṇ; that of the *garmanes* ranges over what would be identified as forest ascetics, *sannyāsins*, shamans and *bhikṣus*. Elsewhere in the text Strabo mentions the *brachmanes* and those opposed to them as the *pramnae*, 'a contentious and disputations sect', of whom there are many varieties.²⁹ Possibly *pramnae* was a garbled version of *parivrajaka* which the various categories seem to resemble.

As regards the *georgoi* or cultivators, he repeats the statement that the *chora* or countryside is *basilikē* or royal and that the farmers cultivate it for a *misthos* and also pay one-fourth of the produce. The statement that the *chora* is royal implies ownership by the king but Strabo does not explicitly state the absence of private property in land as does Diodorus. H. L. Jones translating this passage has glossed it as, 'the farmers cultivate it for wages on condition of receiving a fourth part of the produce'. This reading makes it a very different statement from that of Diodorus and the gloss is not acceptable to many scholars. It would suggest exceptionally well-paid cultivators since they would keep one-fourth of the produce and be paid a wage for their labour on the land. This was unlikely at the time. One may well ask whether it was necessary to attract cultivators to the state lands in order to extend agriculture? This may be compared to Kauṭalya's advice to the king to bring families of *sūdra* cultivators to settle on waste land or deserted land.³⁰ The *Arthasāstra* mentions share-croppers *ardha-sītaka*, in the cultivation of *sītā* lands. Reference is also made to those who give their labour to cultivate land for a share (*bhāga*) of a fourth or a fifth but they do not receive a wage as well.³¹ Those that receive a wage do not have to pay a part of the produce. The problematic word in the Greek texts is *misthos* with its meaning of both wage and rent and either meaning would change the premises of taxation. Perhaps Megasthenes did not think it necessary to comment on privately owned land with its range of tenures and therefore confined himself to discussing only the royal land which as a legal form was in any case both familiar and of greater consequence from his Hellenistic experience. Possibly royal and or the *chora basilikē* had a different revenue demand in the Hellenistic states and therefore Megasthenes felt it necessary to comment on the Indian system.

Strabo then refers to the herdsmen (*poimenes*) and the hunters (*thereutai*) where only the first term is the same as that used by Diodorus. The description of this group is similar to that of Diodorus except that Strabo adds that no private person is permitted to keep a horse or an elephant. Both of these were rare commodities. Horses had to be imported into India and elephants could not be bred but had to be captured, the procedure having been described by Megasthenes.

In his fourth category Strabo includes those that sell their physical labour, that is hired labourers and the retail traders or petty traders in the market place, the *kapelikoi*.³² Some among them adds Strabo are employed by the state alone such as the armour makers and ship builders and they receive a *misthos*/wage and provisions from the king. Other artisans pay a tax, *phoros*, to the state and render prescribed services to the state, (*leitourgiai*). These services may be compared to the *viṣṭi* referred to in the *Arthaśāstra*.³³

The soldiers (*polemistai*) are described as in Diodorus, so also are the overseers (*ephoroi*). The details of the work of the latter are however spelt out more fully and in this the text of Strabo differs from the others. We are told that they keep the rivers in proper condition, inspect the canals and sluices from which water is distributed, measure the land as in Egypt, collect the taxes, superintend the crafts, as well as the building of roads, and the work of the city commissioners and those in charge of armaments. Strabo's experience of administration in Egypt seems to have influenced this description and some scholars doubt that it was included in the original text of Megasthenes.³⁴ Its general tenor however is also suggestive of the work of the *adhyakṣa* in the *Arthaśāstra*. The rendering by some scholars of the *ephoroi* solely as spies would seem from this text to be exaggerated. Some overseers would certainly have used spies as part of their system of work but that does not justify translating the term *ephoroi* as spies. The seventh category about which Strabo has little to say are listed as the *sumbouloi* and the *sunedroi*, both terms again connected with the Boule and the Synod and suggestive of advisors of high rank. He adds that their work covers the entire range of administration since they hold the chief offices of state.

The third text which drew on the original of Megasthenes was the *Indica* of Arrian.³⁵ The author was a native of Bithynia (Asia Minor) and wrote in the early second century A.D. about four hundred years after Megasthenes. He held high offices under the Romans largely because of the patronage of Hadrian, but eventually retired to Athens. He wrote extensively on a variety of subjects but was more centrally a historian and deeply influenced by Xenophon. He was easily the most scholarly of the three authors under discussion. Arrian was also involved in the intellectual movement of the early centuries A.D. which has come to be called the Second Sophistic.³⁶ This expressed itself in a nostalgia for the classical period of Athens recalling the achievements of Athens in the fifth century B.C. by imitating Attic prose and literary forms and often writing in what was by now the archaic Ionian Greek. This movement was in part the result of the prosperity of the Hellenised cities of the eastern Mediterranean in the face of what was seen as subservience to Roman power. Arrian's major work was a history of Alexander of Macedon, the *Anabasis*, and this in a way led to a number of accounts of regions such as Parthia and India where Alexander had campaigned. Arrian used as sources for the *Anabasis*, Ptolemy as well as a large number of contemporary accounts of Alexander such as those of Nearchos, Onesicritus and Aristobulus. The *Indica* is however only a coda to the *Anabasis* since this was not the primary interest of Arrian. As has been rightly said, for Arrian, India had a marginal role between the Macedonians and the Persians who in his perception were the dominant powers at the time of Alexander.³⁷

Quoting from Megasthenes he states that all the Indians are divided into seven *genea*.³⁸ This is different from the earlier two authors who refer to these divisions as *merē*. Was he quoting more precisely from Megasthenes or, was he merely copying Herodotus? Was he substituting a term which he thought was closer in meaning to the concept of caste? Alternatively he may have argued that since the crucial unit involving marriage and occupation was termed the *genos*, it would be more logical to use the same word for the seven divisions as well.

The first category he labels as *sophistoi* and therefore differs from the earlier authors. His description is close to that of the

philosophoi and the *brachmanas* of the earlier authors yet the choice of the word *sophistoi* is curious. It refers to philosophers and teachers, especially peripatetic, and those skilled in art. The religious connotation is less evident in this term. He may have had in mind also the renewal of interest in the sophists as the wise men of a society, during his lifetime. This would agree with his statement that anyone in India can become a sophist, but few do because they have to lead such a hard life. Yet in the *Anabasis* he refers to the *brachmanas* as Indian *sophistai* and at another point refers in a general way to Indian sophists.³⁹ But his description of the sophists has less of brahmanical belief and practices and more of an extensive range of renunciatory sects : in fact more of the *śramanas* than of the *brāhmaṇas*.

The cultivators (*georgoi*) according to him pay *phoros* to the kings and the cities which are self-governing. *Phoros* literally refers to payments of tribute. Arrian makes no reference to ownership of land or to royal ownership. Interestingly in the case of the third category that of the herdsmen and pastoralists (*boukoloi*, *poimenes* and *nomeis*) they are again described as nomadic but are said to pay a *phoros* from the produce of their animals. The same term *phoros* is used even though the animals are not state owned. This would suggest that in the context of land, *phoros* was a tax and not a rent and was probably a share of the produce. The statement is again repeated for the fourth category described by Arrian as the *demiourgikon* and the *kaphlikon*, the artisans and traders. Interestingly *demiourgikon* was the term used for artisan and traders in classical Athens. This category are also said to have paid a *phoros* to the state. The only exceptions are the armourers, shipwrights and sailors employed by the state who are paid a *misthos*. *Misthos* in this case was the wage paid by the state to those whom it employed.

The fifth category of soldiers of *polemistai* are paid so well by the state that they can afford to maintain others on their pay. Again the word *misthos* is used here. In place of the *ephoroi* Arrian uses the term *episkopoi* which has a stronger sense of inspecting and overseeing. The seventh category are the *bouleuomenoi* who deliberate on state matters with the king and with the archons in the autonomous cities. It is from this group that the officers of state are selected and the

list of functions given by Arrian would again point to the *mahāmālaras* of the Mauryan state, although such functions would be performed by senior officers in any well-developed administration.

Arrian concludes with the statement that to marry out of any *genos* is unlawful as also to change professions from one *genos* to another. This is permitted only to the *sophistai*. The consistency of the statement relating to marriage and occupation in all three texts makes it clear that this at least was common to all and undoubtedly went back to Megasthenes. The listing of seven divisions was also common although the element of variation in the terms used suggest that it was more an adaptation from Megasthenes than an actual quotation. Only the terms for cultivators (*georgoi*), herdsmen (*poimenes*) and soldiers (*polemistai*), are common to all three versions. The other terms generally occur in two out of three texts and not always consistently. There are as we have seen discrepancies on the question of agrarian revenue. Similarly the details regarding the first category differ. The crucial term used for the seven divisions varies and two authors use *merē* and *phylon* and the third uses *gene*. All three however use *genos* with reference to marriage relations. Thus the quotations from Megasthenes are only approximate quotations or paraphrased versions. Arrian's style is recognisably different from that of Diodorus and Strabo and his version attempts to give perhaps only the gist of what Megasthenes may have said. The difference may partially also be due to his writing in the Ionian dialect. Clearly the meaning of 'quotation' should not be taken in the more modern sense of stating the actual words of the source. Each author seems to have paraphrased Megasthenes in his own words.

On the question of editing and paraphrasing Megasthenes, Arrian would have had no qualms since he was convinced that most accounts of Alexander's activities and subsequently of his dominions were exaggerated in order to flatter the Macedonian.⁴⁰ Onesicritus was generally held in better esteem perhaps because he was a philosopher and a pupil of Diogenes and because he was a contemporary of Alexander. That he influenced Arrian is suggested for example by his consistent use of the term 'sophist' for what might be called Indian 'holy men' which

usage was followed by Arrian.⁴¹ Another source regarded as reliable by Arrian was the account of Nearchos who wrote not in Ionian Greek but in a *koiné* requiring Arrian to paraphrase his views.⁴² Arrian in any case had his doubts about the reliability of the text of Megasthenes on areas of India beyond the north-west which Megasthenes may possibly not have visited.

Modern historians have debated the veracity of Megasthenes and it is as well to remember that he was regarded with suspicion even by his contemporaries. We are told that he was sent by Seleucus Nicator on an embassy to Sandrocottos (Candragupta) who had his capital at Palibothra (Pāṭaliputra).⁴³ The book would then have been a description of his visit to India at the time of Candragupta the first Mauryan king. Strabo adds that Deimachus was sent on a similar mission to the son of Sandrocottos, Amitrachades, (i.e., the son of Candragupta, Bindusāra), and he too left an account and goes on to say that the accounts of Nearchos and Onesicritus were however more truthful.⁴⁴ Dionysius is believed to have been sent by Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt to ascertain the truth of the account given by Megasthenes. Eratosthenes maintains that Megasthenes and Deimachus accused each other of falsehood.⁴⁵ Arrian states that Megasthenes lived with Sibryitius, the satrap of Arachosia (in modern Afghanistan) and Gedrosia and often visited Sandrocottos.⁴⁶ He may thus have spent most of his time in Kandahar and his perspective on India may therefore have focussed more on north-western India than on the Ganges valley. That Kandahar was an important Greek city, possibly the Alexandria in Arachosia, is suggested by recent excavations and finds.⁴⁷ Megasthenes was familiar with the Seleucid satrapy and kingdom and if he resided in Arachosia then there would be some Seleucid influence in his picture of India. Among later authors Clement of Alexandria⁴⁸ refers to Megasthenes as an historian and Pliny disapproves of both Megasthenes and Dionysius.⁴⁹ Thus the veracity of Megasthenes' account may well have been tempered by his inability to obtain detailed information and therefore the Hellenistic and Seleucid imprint may have been greater than has been recognised so far. The quotations from Megasthenes if seen in the light of this as well may not have been taken too literally. They may have been

introduced and amended by each author partially to give legitimacy to his own descriptions.

The historiographical ancestry of the *Indica* of Megasthenes is linked to similar writing in Egypt and Babylon as has been pointed out. In the Hellenistic world the account of Egypt written before the end of the fourth century B.C. by Hecataeus of Abdera, was widely read and respected and treated as a model.⁵⁰ The state of Egypt was idealised and projected as a new kind of society which had earlier even excited the interest of Plato. Hecataeus though apparently concerned with Pharaonic ideas and the antiquity of Egypt, was at the same time eulogising the Ptolemies. Manethon, an Egyptian writing in Greek in the early third century B.C. reiterated these ideas.⁵¹ The challenge was taken up from another direction when Berossus the Chaldean wrote a history of Babylon which he dedicated to Antiochus I and which was partially a Seleucid reply as it were, to Hecataeus, suggesting that there were systems other than the Egyptian considered worthwhile as forms of government and society.

Megasthenes it has been argued, was doing the same in writing on India.⁵² He was also seeking a utopian society and was projecting India as such. The magic and the marvels were somewhat reduced especially when compared to the discredited earlier account of Ktesias. But the exotica remained. At another level it was a society which gave maximum honour to philosophers, which insisted on the hereditary nature of occupations and which did not require slaves ; all these ideas evoked the interest of contemporary Greeks.⁵³ Nevertheless in the actual structure of the *Indica*, the account of Hecataeus seems to have been the model in as much as it was divided into sections on cosmology, geography, king-lists (of a sort), the organisation of society and social customs.⁵⁴ This format was to be frequently used by Hellenistic writers. Historiographically Arrian is the most important of the three authors quoting from Megasthenes and was influenced by the structure of the earlier *Indica*.⁵⁵ His account is also divided into similar sections and he is even more determined to leave out the marvels and the curiosities with which descriptions of India abounded, what he refers to as the gold-digging ants and the gold guarding griffons.

Apart from the historiographical context there is also the question of the influence of prevalent forms in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic systems which may have coloured the perception of India. The Hellenistic imprint can probably be seen more clearly in the statement on land ownership and agrarian revenue. The economy of the Seleucids, the neighbours of the Mauryas, based largely on agrarian revenue listed as the most important categories of land, the *chora basilike* or the private estates of the king, and the land owned by the independent Greek cities.⁵⁶ The king assigned land from the *chora basilike*. But the existence of royal estates did not preclude ownership of land by the temples or tribes or even private ownership. The *chora basilike* was cultivated under the supervision of officials by hereditary tenants who paid in cash or kind and the payment could also be in the form of a part of the harvest. The payment was for the use of the land which was said to belong to the king, and was based on earlier prevailing systems. Megasthenes would therefore have been familiar with the notion of the *chora basilike* and the Mauryan *sītā* lands may have seemed to him to be the exact counterpart of the Seleucid system. The cultivation of land by the state even if not to the exclusion of private ownership of land, is referred to in the Kauṭilya *Arthaśāstra*, where the king is advised to settle new land or deserted land with *śūdra* cultivators.⁵⁷ This would have been a major change in the economic picture from earlier times and may have been much talked about ; hence suggesting to Megasthenes that the *sītā* lands were far more important than any other system of tenure. The statement regarding cultivation and the payment of a *misthos* may well have been confined to such lands and was not meant to exclude private ownership.

The reference to self-governing cities is puzzling. Although a familiar feature of Hellenistic Asia Minor they are not referred to in Indian sources, unless Megasthenes had in mind a vague notion of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* each of which had an urban centre as its nucleus. The *polis* system of self-governing cities has been described as a pillar of Seleucid power. Lands were assigned to the cities from the estates of the king's land. The cities had considerable autonomy in issuing coins and collecting taxes. The advantage to the Seleucids was that such cities paid a *phoros* or tribute to the ruling family.

The reference to taxes paid to the king and to the self-governing cities in the same passage is so characteristic of the Seleucid system that one may be justified in arguing that this statement could have been taken from the Seleucid system and applied to the Mauryan. Interestingly it is only Arrian, with his experience of Asia Minor who mentions the self-governing cities. Neither Diodorus nor Strabo refer to these, perhaps because they were more familiar with the Ptolemaic kingdom where such cities did not exist.

For both Diodorus and Strabo it was the Ptolemaic state that was possibly the model for systems relating to the Orient, particularly with the increasing communication between the Red Sea and the Indian sub-continent at the turn of the Christian era. The prevalent view in Egypt had been that the gods were the owners of the land and since the kings were their descendents this enabled them to claim ownership.⁵⁸ The *chora* was the estate of the king. Political philosophy was dominated by the idea that the king owns and manages the land and has the right to compulsory labour. Agriculture under the Ptolemies was carefully controlled by a large body of officers who assessed and measured the land and managed the distribution of water, all of which was geared to the goal of revenue collection. Land owned by the king, royal land, was cultivated by peasants under royal control, the *georgoi basilikoi*,⁵⁹ who were under contract to the king by which they paid a share of the produce to the king and cultivated according to instructions. This did not exclude other categories of ownership such as temple lands, service tenures and privately owned land, although royal ownership was the predominant form. Could this have influenced the comprehension by Diodorus and Strabo of agriculture in India as described by Megasthenes and led to the confusion between the two senses of *misthos* ?

In Hellenistic states taxes were paid to the king only from the *chora basilike*. Other categories of land owners such as temples, autonomous cities and individuals, received the contracted amounts from the peasants and had their own arrangements with the king. Since the major land revenue was from the *chora basilike* Megasthenes may have assumed that the same was applicable in India and that there was no need to mention

other tenurial arrangements. By the time that Arrian was writing the economy based on the *chora basilike* had ceased to exist in both the erstwhile Ptolemaic and Seleucid areas. This might in part account for his not referring to the royal ownership of land but merely to the *phoros* paid by the cultivators.

The historiographical context is equally important on the question of social divisions. The term *meros/merē* is familiar to Greek thought particularly through the writings of Aristotle, who would also have had an intellectual influence on Megasthenes. Aristotle's ideas appear to have been known in the centres of Hellenistic activity. It has been suggested that one of his more celebrated disciples, Klearchus, was active at Ai-Khanum the Greek city on the Oxus.⁶⁰ Furthermore that he drew attention to the religion and philosophy of the Persians and the Indians. The Hellenistic cities were doubtless the meeting point of a variety of ideas and theories. In his *Politics*, Aristotle refers to various concepts which seem also to be reflected in the views of Megasthenes. Thus he states that each citizen body was composed of a number of *merē* or parts having widely varying characteristics.⁶¹ He then lists the parts of the citizen body as the *georgoi* or cultivators, the *banausoi* or artisans, the *agoraioi* or traders (including the *emporoi* or inter-state merchants and the *kapeloi* or petty traders) and finally the *thetikon* or labourers working for a wage. In some places soldiers are added as a fifth group.⁶² All these are said to constitute the larger mass of people, the *plethos*. Interestingly both Diodorus and Strabo refer to the *plethos* of people of India being divided into seven *merē*. Aristotle adds that in every city there are three *merē*—the rich, the poor and those of the middle group.⁶³ He emphasises the difference between the rich and the poor and an important element in this difference is honour or *timē* which also bestows status on a person. He states that the rich are armed and the poor are unarmed.⁶⁴

In the general discussion on the constitutions associated with oligarchies and democracies, numerous divisions of people are listed as the *merē*. Generally these include farmers, artisans, traders, seafarers, labourers and servile groups. The classification of the *merē* was a matter of considerable debate at this time and presumably Megasthenes was aware of this debate and perhaps

had it in mind when composing the *Indica*. In discussing the important officers of government, Aristotle heads the list with designations which are included in the list of *ephoroi* in Strabo.⁶⁵ Similarly in passages referring to the requirements of a state the responsibilities of those concerned with food, handicrafts, arms, wealth, religion and decision-making are again suggestive of the divisions listed by Megasthenes although such divisions are so general that they could apply to virtually any society.⁶⁶ According to Aristotle the divisions into *merē* are necessary in order to separate functions and that this was established long since in many areas such as Egypt and Crete.⁶⁷ It has recently been argued that the Aristotelian concept of *merē* virtually means class since property qualifications and the functions they perform in the productive process are an important aspect of a *meros*.⁶⁸ Aristotle ends up with a basic division between the propertied and the propertiless and takes a man's economic position as determining his behaviour. But the *merē* as listed by Aristotle or Megasthenes do not have distinct property qualifications. The *merē* of Megasthenes can perhaps be better explained as being linked to production although even this is not an exhaustive criterion for each category. To use class in the modern sense for *meros* would also be mis-leading as the groups mentioned by Megasthenes do not constitute classes. Megasthenes also mentions that the category of philosophers and of councillors are regarded with respect and have high status or *timē*. The property qualifications or role in production of the former at least would be unimportant to their status. The *georgoi* or peasants, presumably making up the poorer sections of society were kept unarmed. Doubtless the importance of this statement also relates to the argument in Aristotle that arms should be restricted to the rich. That the peasants could continue working in their fields whilst a battle raged in the vicinity, seems to have impressed the Greeks, particularly as the latter had often to resort to conscription.

The seven *merē* of Megasthenes if seen from the perspective of the Aristotelian concept of *merē* make good sense. They are a list of the important divisions of the population involved in the functioning of society. They can be further divided into three broad groups : the first, the philosophers and sophists are those

with the maximum honour or *timē* and prescribe on matters religious ; the next three constitute a second group concerned with economic production since they consist of cultivators, herdsmen, artisans and trader ; and the last three constitute the third group that of persons responsible for administrative functions, namely, soldiers, officials and councillors.

Why did Megasthenes choose the number seven for the *merē* of India ? This may have been based on the seven divisions in Egypt as listed by Herodotus. But it is equally possible as it has been argued that a current Indian concept may explain this number. With the gradual evolution of the monarchical state in India, there emerged by the late fourth century B.C. the notion of the constituent elements of the state. This concept was referred to as the *sapta-prakṛti* or more commonly later as the *saptāṅga*.⁶⁹ These were the seven elements or the seven limbs of the body politic. The listing of the seven elements was of course different from the *merē* of Megasthenes. The *saptāṅga* consisted of the king, the ministers, the capital, the treasury, the army or a form of authority, territory and allies. Possibly when enquiring about notions regarding the polity and the state, the seven elements were quoted to Megasthenes and the remembered the figure but reconstructed the elements on the principles of the *merē* which were more familiar to his own intellectual background.

It is possible therefore that the original text of Megasthenes may have used the word *merē* and have derived the number seven from the *saptāṅga* theory. Arrian perhaps then replaced *merē* by *genea* and retained the term *genos* when it came to marriage and occupation. He may also have seen in this description a similarity in the use of *genos* with the meaning given to it in the classical period of Athens.

The reference to *genos* states the two important characteristics of caste as marriage rules and restrictions and those relating to occupation. Here again Megasthenes picked up the salient points about caste organisation but perhaps confused caste with *meros*. It is also important to consider whether he was referring to *varṇa* or *jāti*. It would seem that he was not referring to *varṇa* for a variety of reasons. *Varṇas* were four in number, possibly five, but never seven. The seven categories are des-

cribed by Megasthenes not by special names but in general descriptive terms. Where *brachmanes* may well refer to the first *varṇa*, brāhmaṇ, there is no further mention of the remaining three. Of the latter the *kṣatriyas* and the *śūdras* as names of ethnic communities were familiar to the Greeks since they are mentioned in the accounts of the campaign of Alexander in the form of Xathroi and Sydracae.⁷⁰ There is curiously no mention of the untouchables or even the Caṇḍālas or the concept of pollution which should have been a strikingly new feature to an observer from another society. (This could be attributed not to a lack of observation but to the influence of a Greek model of social divisions). The occupational groupings are also not suggestive of *varṇa* since it would not have been common to find hired labourers, artisans and traders listed as belonging to one *varṇa*; the former were frequently of *śūdra* status and the latter *vaiśya*. Had Megasthenes been reflecting the dominant ideas of the middle Ganges valley it is possible that he would have listed the *kṣatriyas* as first which was the case in Buddhist and Jaina writings. High status being given to the brāhmaṇs might suggest the influence of brāhmaṇical thinking, except that the compound of brāhmaṇ and *śramaṇa* occurs in the Aśokan inscriptions as a general category and included those in a religious vocation or renouncers and teachers and therefore of high status. The joint mention of brāhmaṇs and *śramaṇas* would again suggest a category other than that of the *varṇa* since the brāhmaṇs and the *śramaṇas* (in many cases) regarded each other with considerable hostility.⁷¹

Whereas the *dharmaśāstra* texts give priority to *varṇa* as the pattern of social organisation, it has been argued that this was more in the nature of a theoretical model or norm or reflective of ritual status; and, that, as is evident from Buddhist sources, *jāti* organisation was the more recognisable and effective social form, in which both kinship and marriage as well as occupation were important factors of identity. The term *genos* which implies a blood/kin connection would be more indicative of *jāti*. Interestingly *genos* is regarded as a cognate of the Sanskrit *jana* which was also the root for the word *jāti*.

Genos has its own history.⁷² Fustel de Coulanges has argued that *genos* was a corporate group with common 'property' and

collective activities as well as symbols of unity. Later writers have argued that it was a form of grouping to which only some families belonged and it developed particularly in Athenian aristocracy. The rich encouraged a pride of lineage to symbolise superior status. Originally they were of the noble *eupatridai* order but gradually families began to claim rights to certain offices and this became parallel to property and each such group of families constituted a *genos*. One family reiterated this right by insisting on a rule of endogamy. The right also constituted its identity as a corporate group.

If we argue that Megasthenes was revised by Arrian as is suggested by Breloer then the explanation for Arrian having replaced *meros* by *genos* would require a finer linguistic analysis of the use of *genos* in the Greek context and its various meanings. Recent studies of *genos* do not help us in arriving at a more precise definition of its use either by Megasthenes or Arrian.

It could of course also be argued that *meros* and *genos* were used arbitrarily, if not interchangeably, in descriptions of alien societies ; and that there was no technical meaning attached to either of them since both Herodotus and Arrian use *genos* for social divisions in societies as distinct as those of Egypt and India. One would then have to look for the specific description of Indian society which might suggest something distinctive, namely, caste. Megasthenes understood the essentials of a caste society when he emphasised the importance of endogamy in marriage, all except for the *brāhmaṇs* ; and of course the principle of hereditary caste status as well as the association of caste with occupation and the restrictions on changing occupation. In this passage from Megasthenes as it has come to us in the three versions which have been discussed, there is a juxtaposition of two statements. First, that Indian society was divided into seven parts. Secondly, that Indian society had specific rules of marriage and occupation. These rules were then illustrated by reference to the seven parts resulting in perhaps an incorrect merging of the two ideas by Megasthenes. His confusion lay in identifying his divisions, the *merē*, with the notion of social divisions in India constituting an endogamous unit and governing hereditary occupations.

The utilisation of texts from the ancient period remains a

complicated process and requires the removing of many veils of obscurity. With greater research into the precise meaning of terms and inevitably therefore of historical interpretation, the translations made in the nineteenth century of such sources have often to be re-examined. There is also the need to be aware of the perceptions of the original authors and of those who in later periods paraphrased the original. This I have tried to demonstrate in arguing that references to the agrarian structure own more perhaps to the imprint of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic systems than to an authentic description of the Mauryan. Whereas Diodorus and Strabo mention the *chora basilike* and refer to the payment of a *misthos*, Arrian makes no mention of royal ownership of land and refers only to a *phoros* or tax. The *chora basilike* was the most important agricultural land in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic states and it was the equivalent of this which Megasthenes was seeking and to which he refers. The phrase *chora basilike* is so closely linked to those two states that its use for Mauryan India echoes the other two.

The importance of crown lands to the Mauryan economy has been argued on the strength of references to *sītā* lands in the *Arthaśāstra* and to Megasthenes' statements regarding the *chora basilike*. I have tried to show that it is necessary to examine the context of such descriptions before taking them as factual. If the Kaṭṭalya *Arthaśāstra* was in fact a text concerned primarily with the revenue of the metropolitan state, the discussion on *sītā* lands would have to be central. The same would be true of Megasthenes if he was describing the *sītā* lands when referring to the *chora basilike*. My problem is with the statement that there were only crown lands. This seems to be both partial and influenced by conditions prevalent elsewhere, as I have tried to argue. That there is disagreement in the three texts following Megasthenes on the ownership of land would point to Megasthenes not having made a clear statement. Was this because the incidence of crown lands was not as extensive as Diodorus and Strabo would have us believe? The confusion in these two authors over whether *misthos* refers to rent or tax or whether it was a wage would indicate that the text of Megasthenes was not categorical on this crucial matter. Or, that the confusion has arisen because there were other tenures which have not been

listed by Megasthenes, but whose contractual conditions had entered the original discussion.

The seven sub-divisions of Indian society as listed by Megasthenes which doubtless drew on some observation, present features of Indian society which require attention. Clearly the definition is in terms other than *varṇa* and is most likely *jāti*. The two characteristics on which there is complete agreement are those referring to endogamous marriage and hereditary occupation. (This is so firmly stated that one almost suspects Megasthenes of having read modern Indian ethnography !). It would seem that a certain parochialism in the functioning of caste is indicated and here I would like to repeat what I said in the first lecture, that there is a need to look at caste along its vertical axis first when trying to assess its role in production.

The Greek in Megasthenes saw these sub-divisions as universal categories, but he lists them in no known order. If he began with the *brāhmaṇs* and *śramaṇas* because they are the most highly respected, he should have proceeded to the next most highly respected group, that of councillors and advisors. But the latter come last and instead the second category are the cultivators because they are the largest in number. He nowhere mentions that they are regarded as of low status. That they are the largest in number would bear out the dependence at this time on agricultural revenue.

Herders and huntsmen which even in Buddhist sources are listed as low, are not referred to as such. But significantly they are identified by *phylon* or tribe, suggesting that they might have been regarded as somehow outside the usual framework of caste society. Were these the *aṭavika* or forest tribes mentioned by both Aśoka and Kauṭilya ?

If they were outside the caste structure then they would have been more mobile. Why then were they not deported and used as labour ? Was it because it was thought safer to leave them in their forests, so that resources from the forests could be more easily tapped through them ? That they did provide revenue in kind is explicitly stated. This may have led to these areas being deliberately cordoned off, to prevent interference. Or was it because hired labour and the large number of cultivators sufficed for Mauryan economic ambitions ?

The commercial economy is neatly tied up in one package which binds together hired labour, artisans and traders, suggestive of the urban guild which in the post-Mauryan period was to integrate all three groups.

Megasthenes elsewhere, makes an important statement which has been dismissed by historians as it appears to conflict with Indian sources. He states that there were no slaves in India and in this respect draws on the similarity with Sparta.⁷³ Perhaps the clue to his meaning lies in the reference to Sparta. Spartan helotage was very much a Spartan phenomenon in the Greek world and there was some discussion as to whether helotage was the same as the more general form of slavery, that of the *doulos*. These were individual slaves and unlike the helots were not an enslaved community owned by the state. What Megasthenes was probably commenting on was the absence of a *doulos* type of slavery with slaves used on a large scale in both agricultural and artisanal production. Indian sources do provide evidence of slaves of the *doulos* variety i.e. men and women owned outright as property, with no legal rights or status and not receiving a wage. However such slaves although used in production, appear in larger numbers as domestic slaves. What is interesting is that Megasthenes although aware of the issue, does not notice the use of either slaves or hired labour in agricultural production. This may have been because if they were paid even a minimal wage as some slaves were, they would not strictly speaking qualify as *doulos*.

There was a time when it was argued that the most reliable source material on ancient India was the literature which emanated from Hellenic and Hellenistic authors. Modern scholars were imbued with the notion that somehow the Greek tradition because it had what Europe recognised more easily as, 'a sense of history' could therefore be depended upon by historians. The world of Vincent Smith may have ended but its resonances still reach out to us as do those of scholars who vehemently insist that such sources by virtue of being 'foreign' cannot be relied upon. Because of the paucity of descriptive narrative sources from the Indian tradition for the first millennium B.C., the Greek texts also came to be regarded as more reliable than the Indian in depicting the actual conditions of

society, rather than the theory behind the institutions. Hence the acute problem over the 'seven castes'. I have tried to argue that even these texts and their context require a more critical investigation before their statements can be taken as fact. This is not an attempt at Orientalism in reverse, for this exercise would be necessary in using any textual material, no matter what its authorship or content.

I have tried to show that the need to consider the ideological influences on the authors of texts becomes significant in that authors are given to ideological positions whether they are aware of these or not. It would be as well to keep in mind Arnaldo Momigliano's assessment of the ancient historians when he writes, 'Greek and Roman historians in fact, after Herodotus, did very little research into the past and relatively seldom undertook to collect first-hand evidence about foreign countries. They concentrated on contemporary history or summarised and reinterpreted the work of former historians'.⁷⁴ The use of such literary sources then becomes an enterprise in going beyond the obvious : a process which requires of historical study a proximity both to the comparative method and to historiography.

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27. XV. 1. 59 ff : FGrH 715 F. 33.
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65. *Ibid.* VI. 8.
66. *Ibid.* VII. 8, 9.
67. *Ibid.* VII. 10.
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71. Patanjali, *Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣyam*, II. 4.9 (I. 476).
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73. Diodorus II, 39.
74. A. Momigliano, 'Herodotus in the History of Historiography', in *Studies in Historiography*, New York, 1966, p. 130.

Errata

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Read</i>
4	5	minute	minutiae
4	31	empire develop	empire can develop
12	20	ministrels	minstrels
18	32	Jātaka	<i>Jātaka</i>
19	10	later	latter
19	18	this	his
25	9	<i>devanampiya</i>	devānampiya
26	27	he	the
26	28	suggst	suggest
27	13	slaves, however, low	slaves, however low,
28	1	prisoner-of-war	prisoners-of-war
29	29	Rook	Rock
29	33	2.24 ; 2.24 ; 2, 6	2.24 ; 2.6
31	6	Indo-Hallenistic	Indo-Hellenistic
32	18	Indica	<i>Indica</i>
33	23	<i>gene</i>	<i>genē</i>
36	29	philosophoi	<i>philosophoi</i>
40	2	<i>sannyāsins</i>	<i>samnyāsins</i>
40	37	and	land
42	38	<i>sophistoi</i>	<i>sophistai</i>
44	21	<i>gena</i>	<i>genē</i>
49	27	of	or
51	4	trader	traders
51	21	the	he
54	8	own	owe
55	30	Afoka	Aśoka